



G. W. F. Hegel

Key Concepts

Edited by
Michael Baur



G. W. F. Hegel

The thought of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) has had a deep and lasting influence on a wide range of philosophical, political, religious, aesthetic, cultural and scientific movements. But despite the far-reaching importance of Hegel's thought, there is often a great deal of confusion about what he actually said or believed.

G. W. F. Hegel: Key Concepts provides an accessible introduction to both Hegel's thought and Hegel-inspired philosophy in general, demonstrating how his concepts were understood, adopted and critically transformed by later thinkers. The first section of the book covers the principal philosophical themes in Hegel's system: epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, ethical theory, political philosophy, philosophy of nature, philosophy of art, philosophy of religion, philosophy of history and theory of the history of philosophy. The second section covers the main post-Hegelian movements in philosophy: Marxism, existentialism, pragmatism, analytic philosophy, hermeneutics and French post-structuralism.

The breadth and depth of *G. W. F. Hegel: Key Concepts* makes it an invaluable introduction for philosophical beginners and a useful reference source for more advanced scholars and researchers.

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G. W. F. Hegel

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First published 2015
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

G. W. F. Hegel : key concepts / edited by Michael Baur.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 1770-1831. I. Baur, Michael.

B2948.G23 2014

193--dc23

2014027861

ISBN: 978-1-84465-794-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-84465-795-7 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-74429-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman

by Taylor & Francis Books

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Abbreviations

Works by Hegel

<i>EnLogic</i>	<i>The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with Zusätze</i> (Hegel 1991b)
<i>EnMind</i>	<i>Hegel's Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences, 1830</i> (Hegel 1971)
<i>EnNature</i>	<i>Hegel's Philosophy of Nature: Being Part Two of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences, 1830</i> (Hegel 1970a)
<i>FPS</i>	<i>First Philosophy of Spirit</i> (in Hegel 1979)
<i>LFA</i>	<i>Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art</i> (Hegel 1975a)
<i>LHP</i>	<i>Lectures on the History of Philosophy</i> (Hegel 1983)
<i>LPR</i>	<i>Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion</i> (Hegel 1984–87)
<i>LPWH</i>	<i>Lectures on the Philosophy of World History – Introduction: Reason in History</i> (Hegel 1975b)
<i>PCR</i>	“The Positivity of the Christian Religion” (in Hegel 1970b)
<i>PH</i>	<i>The Philosophy of History</i> (Hegel 1991c)
<i>PR</i>	<i>Elements of the Philosophy of Right</i> (Hegel 1991a)
<i>PS</i>	<i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i> (Hegel 1977)
<i>SCF</i>	“The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate” (in Hegel 1970b)
<i>SEL</i>	<i>System of Ethical Life</i> (in Hegel 1979)
<i>SL</i>	<i>Science of Logic</i> (Hegel 1969)
<i>TE</i>	“The Tübingen Essay” (in Hegel 1984b)
<i>W</i>	<i>Werke in zwanzig Bänden</i> (Hegel 1970–71)

Works by authors other than Hegel

- CPR* Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1998);
intertextual references are to the page numbers of this
edition and also to the page numbers of the 1781 (A)
and 1787 (B) editions
- MER* *The Marx–Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker
(Marx & Engels 1978)

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Introduction

Michael Baur

The thought of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) is generally acknowledged to have had a deep and lasting influence on a wide range of philosophical, political, religious, aesthetic, cultural and scientific movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These movements include, but are not limited to, Marxism, Romanticism, existentialism, pragmatism, structuralism and post-structuralism, hermeneutics, and even intellectual trends associated with evolutionary biology (because of Hegel's emphasis on process and conflict in natural processes) and relativity physics (because of Hegel's view that space and time are not externally related).

In spite of the widely acknowledged importance of Hegel's thought, however, there is a great deal of confusion about what Hegel actually said or believed. It is well known that Hegel's philosophy is difficult to understand; indeed, his writings can seem even impenetrable to those who are not familiar with the broad outlines of his thought. There are at least three reasons for the difficulty. First, Hegel was an exceedingly innovative and original thinker. In order to avoid what he regarded as the shortcomings of the philosophers who preceded him, Hegel found it necessary to challenge the unacknowledged presuppositions of his predecessors and thus to develop a unique terminology that would give adequate expression to his equally unique way of thinking. Second, Hegel was a very comprehensive and systematic thinker. In order to grasp the full meaning of any particular part within Hegel's system, it is necessary to appreciate the context of the whole; and yet because the whole of his thought is so complex and comprehensive, it is often difficult to understand the full meaning of any particular part. Third and finally, Hegel developed his innovative and systematic philosophy in continuous dialogue with his own contemporaries, who also developed their own unique vocabularies and styles of philosophizing. Thus, in order to understand Hegel, it is necessary also to understand the historical

context within which, and in response to which, Hegel was developing his own philosophical views.

Much has already been written about Hegel's life, his philosophy, his intellectual predecessors, his influence on other thinkers and the relevance of his thought to a wide variety of contemporary concerns. The present book does not aim to re-trace the vast territory that has already been covered in Hegel scholarship, nor does it aim to re-try the many cases that have been put forward in defence or in condemnation of Hegel's work as a philosopher. The aim of this book, rather, is to provide a generally accessible – and yet historically sensitive and philosophically rigorous – introduction to Hegel's thought and legacy. What is distinctive about this book is that it introduces Hegel's philosophy by focusing specifically on a set of “key concepts” at work in Hegelian and post-Hegelian thought.

In accordance with its focus on “key concepts” in Hegelian and post-Hegelian thought, this book is divided into two main parts. Part I (on “Hegel's thought”) covers the principal philosophical topics addressed in Hegel's system. Admittedly, no limited set of topics can fully exhaust the richness of Hegel's philosophy, and no two topics within such a set are entirely disconnected or separable from one another. Nevertheless, the main topics addressed in Hegel's philosophy can be understood as corresponding to a set of issues discussed in contemporary philosophy (and corresponding to ten chapters in this book): epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, ethical theory, political philosophy, philosophy of nature, philosophy of art, philosophy of religion, philosophy of history and theory of the history of philosophy. Part II (on “Hegel's legacy”) covers key post-Hegelian trends in philosophy that emerged as developments upon (or as critical reactions to) Hegel's philosophy over the past two hundred years. Once again, no limited list of trends or of post-Hegelian developments can do full justice to the complicated and extensive influence that Hegel's thought has exercised over the past two centuries. Still, a genuine appreciation of some of the breadth and depth of Hegel's legacy can be gained if one considers just the most important post-Hegelian philosophical developments in North America and continental Europe. These developments (corresponding to six separate chapters in this book) include: Marxism, existentialism, pragmatism, analytic philosophy, hermeneutics and French post-structuralism.

Context and overview of Hegel's life

Hegel was born on 27 August 1770, in the city of Stuttgart within the duchy of Württemberg, in what today is southwest Germany. He was

the first of seven children born to Maria Magdalena Louisa (née Fromm) Hegel and Georg Ludwig Hegel, who served as a secretary in the revenue office within the court of Karl Eugen ("Charles Eugene"), Duke of Württemberg from 1737 to 1793. Four of Hegel's younger siblings died in their infancy. The two siblings who survived their infancy were his sister Christiane (born 1773) and his brother Georg Ludwig (born 1776). Christiane committed suicide in 1832, and Georg Ludwig died in 1812 while serving as an officer in Napoleon's military campaign in Russia. Hegel's mother died in 1783, shortly after Hegel turned thirteen years old, while Hegel's father died in 1799. The house in which Hegel was born (at Eberhardstraße 53, Stuttgart) stands to this day and serves as a museum ("Museum Hegelhaus") commemorating and honouring the life and work of one of Stuttgart's most famous native sons.¹

When Hegel was a small boy, at the age of three, he entered the local German school. At home he received basic Latin lessons from his mother, and so by the time he was five and enrolled at the Latin school, he had already learned the first declension in Latin. In 1776 or 1777, when he was six or seven years old (there is conflicting evidence on the precise date), Hegel entered the Stuttgart *Gymnasium*, where he was to remain until 1788. Hegel's first biographer, Karl Rosenkranz, has observed that Hegel's early education at the *Gymnasium* "belonged entirely to the Enlightenment with respect to principle and entirely to classical antiquity with respect to curriculum" (1963: 10). One should be careful not to draw too many sweeping conclusions from Rosenkranz's now-famous observation. Nevertheless, it is fair to say – in line with Rosenkranz's observation – that even during the earliest stages of his intellectual formation, Hegel was given the occasion to begin broaching a question that would later become a central concern of his: how, if at all, might the ideals of classical antiquity (which emphasized the priority and importance of unity, wholeness and harmony) be reconciled with the seemingly contrary tendencies at work in modern Enlightenment thought (which tends to emphasize a set of separations: between mind and nature, between reason and feeling, and between fellow-feeling and self-interest)?

After completing his studies at the *Gymnasium* in 1788, Hegel moved to Tübingen at the age of eighteen in order to enter what was called the Tübinger Stift, a seminary whose primary purpose was to educate and train clergy for the Duchy of Württemberg. Shortly after his arrival in Tübingen (in the fall of 1788), Hegel became friends with Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), who was later to gain fame as a poet. Two years thereafter (in 1790), Hegel became friends with Friedrich

Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854), who – like Hegel – was later to gain fame as a professional philosopher. For a period of time, Hegel, Hölderlin and Schelling (along with several other students) were roommates, sharing accommodations at the Tübinger Stift. Although the Stift was a seminary whose purpose was to train young men for the clergy, there is good reason to think that Hegel (as well as Hölderlin and Schelling) had no intention of becoming clerics themselves. In all likelihood, they enrolled at the Stift with little or no clerical aspirations, but simply with the intention of obtaining an education at the state's expense (Harris 1972: 64).² In the summer of 1789, during his second year at the Stift, there occurred two events which we in retrospect can recognize as rather important events for the young Hegel. First, Hegel took J. F. Flatt's course on "Empirical Psychology and Kant's Critique", which in all likelihood gave him his first opportunity to undertake the serious study of Kant's critical philosophy (*ibid.*: 83). Second, on 14 July in Paris, crowds stormed the Bastille (a fortress used as a prison for holding political prisoners and enemies of the state), thereby giving birth to the French Revolution. Even though Hegel was later troubled by the bloody Terror made possible by the Revolution, he spoke in favour of the Revolution while a student at the Stift and remained a supporter of the Revolution's ideals throughout the rest of his life.

In 1793, Hegel completed his studies at the Stift and moved from Tübingen to Berne (Switzerland) in order to take up a job as *Hofmeister* (house tutor) for the family of Captain Karl Friedrich von Steiger. In Berne, Hegel had free time to study some of the great works of history (including Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*) and philosophy (including Kant's three *Critiques*); however, he also felt very isolated in Berne, and longed to move to a place closer in proximity to friends like Hölderlin and Schelling, and to cities such as Weimar and Jena, where so much cultural and philosophical excitement was then being generated (by famous contemporaries including Goethe, Schiller and Fichte). In 1797, thanks in large part to Hölderlin's efforts and connections, Hegel was able to move to Frankfurt am Main and begin work as *Hofmeister* for the family of Johann Noë Gogel, a wealthy wine merchant. While in Frankfurt, Hegel read works by Plato, Sextus Empiricus and his own friend Schelling, and began immersing himself in the serious study of Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals*. Also and perhaps just as importantly, he was able to re-establish regular contact with his friend Hölderlin, whose epistolary novel, *Hyperion (or, The Hermit in Greece)*, appeared in 1797.

The death of Hegel's father in 1799 left him with an inheritance which, though modest, finally freed him from constantly depending for

his livelihood on the earnings he could generate as a house tutor. In early 1801, he moved to Jena, where he joined his friend Schelling (already a professor of philosophy) at the university. Hegel's initial appointment at the University of Jena was an appointment as a *Privatdozent*, or unsalaried lecturer; this meant that the level of his income depended on the level of interest he could generate among students who had the option of attending (and paying for) his lectures. Also while in Jena, in 1801, Hegel successfully defended his *Habilitationsschrift* (dissertation) under the Latin title "De Orbitis Planetarum" ("On the Orbits of the Planets"). Starting in 1802, Hegel and Schelling together co-founded and co-edited the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*. Although the life-span of this journal was a rather short one (the journal ceased publication in 1803, when Schelling moved from the University of Jena to the University of Würzburg), it provided an important publication-venue for some of Hegel's early work, including: *Faith and Knowledge*, *The Relation of Scepticism to Philosophy* and *On the Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law*. It was during his time in Jena that Hegel also wrote and published what, according to many scholars, was to become his most famous and most influential work, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Given the historical and philosophical importance of Hegel's *Phenomenology* (Hegel described the work as a "ladder" designed to lead ordinary consciousness naturally and non-violently from its own standpoint to the standpoint of philosophical science; see *PS* 14–15), the circumstances leading up to and following the *Phenomenology*'s publication may seem rather surprising. First of all, Hegel wrote much of the book under great pressure. He was in a rush to finish the manuscript quickly since arrangements to publish the book were made on the basis of a personal guarantee from his friend, Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer. Niethammer had promised the publisher (Goebhardt in the city of Bamberg) that he would cover the book's publication costs (he pledged to buy the book's entire print-run), if Hegel failed to submit the completed manuscript by the agreed-upon deadline of 18 October 1806. Furthermore, Hegel was writing the book at a time when fighting was taking place in surrounding areas between Napoleon's French soldiers and the defending Prussian armies. At times, Hegel was obliged to send instalments of the *Phenomenology*'s manuscript through French lines by means of courier. And in a famous letter (dated 1 May 1807, to Schelling), Hegel reports that he finished writing the main text of the *Phenomenology* "in the middle of the night before the Battle of Jena" which commenced early on 14 October 1806 (see Hegel 1984a: 80). The manuscript of the *Phenomenology*'s

“Preface” was not completed and sent to the publisher until January of 1807. In April of 1807, the work was finally published in its entirety.

In spite of the successful publication of the work for which he was later to gain great fame, Hegel’s financial circumstances and professional outlook were not encouraging. His lecturing at the University of Jena did not give him much financial security. Furthermore, he now found himself to be the new father of an illegitimate son. In the late spring of 1806, Hegel impregnated his landlady and housekeeper in Jena (Christiana Charlotte Johanna Burkhardt, née Fischer). On 5 February 1807, just two weeks after Hegel finished writing the “Preface” to the *Phenomenology*, she gave birth to Hegel’s son (Ludwig Fischer). Having recently been abandoned by her husband, Johanna Burkhardt now depended upon Hegel for financial support. In the midst of worries about his finances, his professional career and his obligations to Johanna and Ludwig, Hegel moved to Bamberg in March of 1807, becoming editor of the local newspaper, the *Bamberger Zeitung*.

Hegel’s work as newspaper editor in Bamberg gave him some degree of financial stability and social clout, but he never relinquished the desire to obtain a regular and well-paying position within an academic institution. After roughly one and a half years as newspaper editor, a modest academic opportunity presented itself. Hegel’s friend Niethammer, serving as the Commissioner of Education in Bavaria, wrote to Hegel in October of 1808 in order to offer the position of rector at the Ägidiengymnasium in Nuremberg. The rectorship in Nuremberg was not exactly the university position that Hegel truly wanted, but it was nevertheless something better than the editorship he currently had in Bamberg. Within a month (in November) he took up his new post as *Gymnasium*-rector in Nuremberg, where he remained for eight years (until 1816). Even while occupied with his administrative duties at the *Gymnasium*, Hegel was both socially and intellectually active in Nuremberg. In September of 1811, he married Marie von Tucher, the daughter of a well-to-do Nuremberg patrician; he continued to work out his thinking on logic and metaphysics; he gave lectures on logic and metaphysics (with mixed success, even in his own estimation) to students at the *Gymnasium*; and he finished writing his *Wissenschaft der Logik* (*Science of Logic*), a major project which had occupied him since his days in Jena. The first volume of the *Science of Logic* (the Logic of Being) was published in 1812; the second volume (the Logic of Essence) appeared in 1813; and the third volume (the Logic of the Concept) was published in 1816. In Nuremberg, Hegel and his wife Marie also started a family. Their first child, a girl

named Susanna Maria Louisa Wilhelmine, was born on 27 June 1812, but died only six weeks later, on 8 August 1812. Two other children came along soon thereafter: their first son Karl Friedrich Wilhelm was born on 7 June 1813 (he lived until 1901) and their second son Immanuel Thomas Christian was born on 24 September 1814 (he later edited the second, 1840 edition of Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of world history and lived until 1891).

After eight years in Nuremberg, Hegel finally achieved what had been a long-standing dream of his: he secured a regular, salaried, university-level academic appointment, taking the position of University Professor at the University of Heidelberg in October of 1816. At Heidelberg, Hegel delivered lectures on logic and metaphysics, the history of philosophy, political philosophy and aesthetics. In 1817, Hegel published the first edition of his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, a comprehensive presentation of his philosophical system as a whole, composed of three parts: on Logic, on the Philosophy of Nature and on the Philosophy of Mind (or Spirit). Also in 1817, Hegel and his wife Marie took into their household Hegel's illegitimate son, Ludwig Fischer, who was now ten years old and had been living in an orphanage in Jena.

Hegel's stay in Heidelberg was relatively short-lived, since his philosophical reputation was growing and giving rise to newer and greater professional opportunities for him. In 1818, he accepted an appointment at the University of Berlin, filling the chair in philosophy that had once been occupied by Johann Gottlieb Fichte. It was in Berlin that Hegel reached the height of his fame and influence as a philosopher, attracting the large numbers of students and followers who would later be identified (positively by themselves and pejoratively by others) as "Hegelians". While a professor in Berlin, Hegel published his *Philosophy of Right* (1820); he founded the *Yearbooks for Scientific Critique* (1826) and published several reviews in that journal; he published two updated editions of his *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* (1827, 1830); and he was elected to the position of rector at the University of Berlin (1830). Hegel was 61 years old when death came to him, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, on the evening of 14 November 1831. Hegel's death occurred in the midst of a cholera outbreak in the region and since the outbreak had taken the lives of other well-known intellectuals (e.g. the military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, who died on 16 November 1831), the doctors initially ruled that Hegel had died as a result of cholera also. However, Hegel did not have any of the usual outward symptoms of cholera, so it is more likely that his death was caused by an especially severe bout with an upper gastrointestinal disease (something from which he might have suffered as early as 1827, when he had

taken ill on a visit to Paris). In accordance with his wishes, Hegel was buried in Berlin's Dorotheenstadt Cemetery, near the gravesites of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) and Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger (1780–1819).

Context and overview of Hegel's thought

According to standard accounts of the history of philosophy, Hegel's philosophy (along with the philosophy of Fichte and Schelling) belongs to the school and period of thought generally identified under the label of "German Idealism". Also according to the standard accounts, the key task which the German Idealists set for themselves was the task of bringing to successful completion the revolutionary philosophical and cultural project initiated by Immanuel Kant with his three critiques (the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Critique of Judgment*). For the German Idealists, the successful completion of Kant's critical project would require, at the very least, the development of a theory of knowledge which recognized (along with Kant) the active role that the knowing subject plays in bringing it about that there are objects of experience in the first place. Kant insisted on the active role played by the knowing subject when he famously argued, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, that "the *a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience" (*CPR* 234 = A111). More specifically, Kant argued that there is a "synthetic unity of appearances" within experience and that this unity is made possible by our own conceptual activity. If there were no such "synthetic unity of appearances", then "all relation of cognition to objects would also disappear, since the appearances would lack connection in accordance with universal and necessary laws", in which case such "appearances" could not be experienced but "would be as good as nothing for us" (*CPR* 234 = A110–11). In other words, if our own conceptual activity did not somehow bring about a "synthetic unity of appearances", then such appearances could not even count as appearances for us, in which case there would be no such things as objects of experience for us. Unfortunately, Kant's insistence on the active role played by the knowing subject gave rise to a set of serious philosophical difficulties. After all, if the knowing subject's own conceptual activity somehow plays a crucial role in bringing it about that there are objects of experience for us in the first place, then on what basis (if at all) can one affirm that the knowing subject – in spite of its activity – is nevertheless also passive or receptive in relation to what is known?

On the standard account, Kant's attempt to explain how human knowing is somehow passive and receptive, and thus not fully active and not fully creative of what is known, led him to some untenable conclusions. This is because Kant was led to conclude that the knower's activity in knowing, if it is to be receptive and not fully creative, must depend on something that remains what it is, independent of and apart from the knower's own activity in knowing. This independent "something" must make a difference to the knower's act of knowing, which is to say that it must contribute some kind of content or determinacy to what is known by the knower. For if this independent "something" did not make any difference or did not contribute anything whatsoever to the known, then the knower's activity in knowing could not be said to be dependent on it (and thus could not be said to be receptive in relation to it). By holding that an independent "something" makes a difference and thus contributes something to the knower's knowing, however, Kant ended up violating the strictures imposed by his own philosophy. Kant had argued, after all, that we can have no knowledge of what is the case independent of and apart from our own activity in knowing (that is, we can have no knowledge of what is the case beyond the bounds of our own possible experience). In seeking to explain the passivity or receptivity of human knowing by reference to an independent "something" apart from and outside of the knower's own knowing, Kant was (implicitly) claiming to know more than he was epistemically licensed to claim, given the conclusions drawn out in his own critical philosophy.

The standard picture regarding the problematic character of Kant's critical philosophy is helpfully represented in the work of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, who anticipated at least some aspects of the German Idealists' thinking on Kant. In the "Appendix" to his 1787 work, *David Hume on Faith*, Jacobi complained that Kant's appeal to an independent something (or – what amounts to the same thing for Jacobi – his appeal to a "transcendental object" or a "thing-in-itself") was a necessary feature of the Kantian system, but ultimately also incompatible with the system itself. For Jacobi, it was necessary for Kant to rely on some notion of a transcendental object or thing-in-itself, since Kant began his philosophizing by assuming that human knowing is finite, passive and receptive in relation to what is known. As a necessary correlate to this assumption, Kant had to posit the existence of a transcendental object or thing-in-itself which somehow acted upon the knower and rendered the knower's act of knowing finite and receptive. As part of his system, however, Kant also argued that we finite human knowers cannot obtain knowledge of anything lying beyond our representations

or beyond the bounds of possible experience. It followed for Kant that we cannot, in fact, have knowledge about the existence or activity of a transcendental object or thing-in-itself that allegedly renders our knowing finite and receptive. Thus the idea of a transcendental object or thing-in-itself is both required by and yet prohibited by the Kantian system. As Jacobi famously complained: “*without* that presupposition [of a transcendental object or thing-in-itself], I could not enter into the [Kantian] system, but *with* that presupposition, I could not stay within it” (Jacobi 1994: 336).

Now the standard picture regarding the internal tensions at work in the Kantian system – at least as this system was understood by Jacobi and the German Idealists – is not an inaccurate picture. However, the standard picture can easily mislead one into thinking that the German Idealists’ worries about Kant were focused primarily on the untenable epistemological or metaphysical doctrines that they found in his work (including, for example, the doctrine of the “transcendental object” or “thing-in-itself”). To be sure, the German Idealists (including Hegel) thought that Kant’s philosophy was ultimately inadequate as a philosophy of knowledge (or epistemology) and inadequate as a philosophy of being (or metaphysics). And it was inadequate, in their view, for some of the reasons given by Jacobi. But it does not follow from this that their worries about Kant’s epistemology and about Kant’s metaphysics were strictly *epistemological* or *metaphysical* in nature. It would be just as accurate to say that Hegel and the German Idealists were worried about the unresolved epistemological and metaphysical problems in Kant’s thought since these (supposedly theoretical or doctrinal) problems were directly connected to practical problems at the heart of modern culture and life in general. To understand further how this is the case, it will help if we consider some observations from Johann Gottlieb Fichte.

Fichte was especially critical of the idea that the passive or receptive character of human knowing could be adequately explained by appeal to the notion of an independent “something” which somehow grounds our knowing or causes it to have the determinacy that it has. In a 1793 letter which he wrote to Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, Fichte provides an especially clear and poignant articulation of the problem:

Kant demonstrates that the causal principle is applicable merely to appearances and nevertheless he assumes that there is a substrate underlying all appearances – an assumption undoubtedly based on the law of causality (at least this is the way Kant’s followers argue). Whoever shows us how Kant arrived at this substrate

without extending the causal law beyond its limits will have understood Kant.

(Fichte 1988: 369)

For Fichte, the task of the philosopher is to give an account of the finite or limited character of human knowing – that is, its character as passive or receptive – yet without appealing to the pre-critical or dogmatic notion of an independent “something” or substrate that allegedly grounds this knowledge or causes it to be the way that it is. A philosopher who is able to give such an account will have truly understood Kant, since Kant – after all – was trying (even if he was not entirely successful) to give just such an account.

Fichte believed that one who has truly understood Kant (and Fichte maintained that he *did* truly understand Kant) will also have understood the truly liberating and revolutionary character of Kant’s thought – not just in the realm of theory but in the realm of practice as well. This is because, for Fichte, the pre-critical, dogmatic belief in a “transcendental object”, “thing-in-itself” or “underlying substrate” (that is, belief in an independent “something” that allegedly lies beyond our knowledge yet also makes our knowledge possible) was intimately connected to pre-critical, regressive thought in morals and politics. Fichte helpfully explains this connection in the draft of an unfinished letter intended for his friend, Jens Baggeson:

My system is the first system of freedom. Just as France has freed man from external shackles, so my system frees him from the fetters of things in themselves, which is to say, from those external influences with which all previous systems – including the Kantian – have more or less fettered man. Indeed, the first principle of my system presents man as an independent being.

(Fichte 1988: 385)

Fichte’s main point (and it is a point that he makes consistently though less directly throughout his philosophical works) is sufficiently clear: just as it should be possible to give an account of the receptive and finite character of human knowing yet without reliance on the (dogmatic, pre-critical) idea of an independent “something” outside of our knowing, so too it should be possible to give an account of what is morally and politically right, yet without reliance on the (dogmatic, regressive) idea of an independent, antecedently given order of things.

Like Fichte, Hegel was keenly aware of the epistemological and metaphysical difficulties attendant upon the notion that an independent

“something” or “transcendental object” or “thing-in-itself” allegedly grounds or makes possible our finite knowing. And like Fichte, Hegel was also convinced that a true understanding of Kant’s thought – an understanding that got beyond Kant’s own limited thinking about the “thing-in-itself” – would unlock the truly revolutionary potential of Kant’s thought, in practice as well as in theory. Writing to his friend Niethammer in October of 1808, Hegel observed: “Once the realm of representation [*Vorstellung*] is revolutionized, actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] will not hold out” (Hegel 1984a: 179).

For Hegel, a revolutionized understanding of how we know the world and represent the world to ourselves would at the same time entail a revolutionized way of being in the world. This is itself a direct implication of the Hegelian view about knowing. On the Hegelian view, it is not the case that our knowing depends on content or input from some altogether independent “transcendental object” or “thing-in-itself” which allegedly is what it is entirely apart from our activity in knowing it. On the contrary, any determinate, knowable thing is what it is for us, only because of our own activity in knowing it. But precisely because no determinate, knowable thing simply is what it is “in itself” (no determinate, knowable thing is what it is apart from our activity in knowing it), it follows that our actual being in the world *is what it is* only insofar as it *is what it is for us*. Our actual being in the world is never something we can come to know as if it were a set of facts existing prior to or independent of our activity in knowing; rather, our actual being in the world always *is what it is as informed* by our own activity in knowing.

Now in turn, because our very own knowing is not a “thing-in-itself” but rather is always *what it is as informed* by our activity in knowing, a transformation in our knowing of knowing (a transformation in our understanding of what knowing is) entails a transformation in the *very way that we do* the knowing. And a transformation in the way that we do the knowing entails a transformation in anything that is known through such knowing, since (as we have seen on Hegel’s account) what we know is never some independent “transcendental object” or “thing-in-itself” which allegedly is what it is entirely apart from our activity in knowing. In short: a transformation in our *knowing of knowing* entails a transformation in the *doing* of our knowing and this in turn entails a transformation of the *being* of anything known through such transformed knowing (and such being includes our actual being in the world).³

The preceding paragraph essentially makes the point that, for Hegel, the Kantian problem of the “thing-in-itself” is not merely a theoretical

problem arising within the academic disciplines of epistemology and metaphysics, it is in fact a problem that cuts to the heart of our actual, concrete being in the world. For Hegel, as long as our concrete activities are informed by the (inadequate) epistemological view that our knowing is finite because it is passive or receptive with respect to an independent “something” beyond it, we will continue to believe (through a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy) that our very being in the world is not truly ours but is instead determined by an independent “something” beyond ourselves. Hegel believed that a genuine and radical transformation of the world is not to be achieved simply through intensified practical activity if such activity remains informed by an inadequate account of human finitude. It is imperative as a practical as well as a theoretical matter to account for the finitude of human knowing, yet without reliance on the untenable notion of a thing-in-itself or independent “something” beyond.

Indeed, the entirety of Hegel’s philosophy might be understood as a systematically ordered set of reflections on what just such an account of human finitude would mean in the various areas of human knowledge and human endeavour. For Hegel, the untenable notion of a thing-in-itself or an independent “something” makes its appearance – often in disguised form – in every branch of philosophy and knowledge. We have already seen, briefly, how this notion plays a role in matters of epistemology and metaphysics. But the doctrine also makes its appearance in the philosophy of mind (in the form of mind–body dualisms); ethical and political philosophy (in the dualisms of freedom and nature); the philosophy of nature (in the separation of teleology and mechanism); the philosophy of art (in the separation of reason and feeling); the philosophy of religion (in the separation of humans from God); and the philosophy of history (in the separation of what is living from what is simply over and done with).

Notes

- 1 For more on the life and times of Hegel, see the extensive biography by Terry Pinkard (2000).
- 2 For more on Hegel’s intellectual development, see the extremely well-researched, two-volume account by H. S. Harris, *Hegel’s Development* (1972, 1983).
- 3 This paragraph can be understood as an extended comment on Hegel’s claim (in the “Introduction” to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) that “consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself” (PS 53); “in the alteration of the knowledge, the object itself alters”, for “as the knowledge changes, so too does the object ... ” (PS 54).

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Part I

Hegel's thought

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1 Epistemology

Jeffery Kinlaw

Hegel undoubtedly defends a substantive theory of knowledge in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Identifying the integrity and precise contours of that theory, however, can be frustrating even for the most assiduous philosopher. A major source of difficulty is that Hegel appropriates elements from conflicting theories. For instance, his epistemology is internalist and yet it has a significant reliabilist component. He defends a form of idealism – experience is conceptualized “all the way out” – but in important respects Hegel is an epistemological realist, a view defended thoroughly by Kenneth R. Westphal (1988, 1989, 2003). And whereas the nature of truth is correspondence, Hegel defends a coherentist criterion for truth.

I argue that Hegel’s epistemology is read most profitably when interpreted as a normative theory. I use the term “normative” in order to convey the sense that the criterion for knowledge and the means for testing that criterion are internal to the shared practices of what Hegel calls a *geistlich* community (roughly understood as a community animated by a set of shared intellectual and ethical commitments). Hegel investigates the possibility of knowledge by analysing the actual practice of acquiring knowledge.¹ The test for knowledge is the functional coherence of the specific type of epistemic practice. Justification of knowledge-claims is a social practice² whose basis lies within the mutually shared and recognized epistemic norms by which reasons for beliefs and actions are critically evaluated. Normative authority emerges from individuals’ participation in a community defined as a shared network of recognitive relations which govern everyday practices and which individuals can identify with, but also critically challenge. Epistemic norms that modern subjects take as rationally authoritative or the basis for justification are norms they understand themselves “to have come to take” (to borrow Pinkard’s phrase) as justificatory – or, more precisely, norms they understand themselves as having come

to *establish* as rationally authoritative. In sum, I claim that Hegel's theory is non-metaphysical and normative "all the way out". Justification is not secured by having one's knowledge-claims conform to the world, but rather results from confirmation of claims by others in terms of mutually acknowledged norms for justification – thus the salient question is: what are the necessary requirements for an efficient and scepticism-resistant account of the practice of justification?

Among those requirements is a certain shared self-conception among epistemic agents. Hegel contends that any way of knowing presupposes a certain self-conception by the knowing subject with which that form of knowing is correlated. Accordingly, *absolute knowing* is the epistemic standpoint of modern subjects who understand themselves as autonomous agents whose agency is nonetheless mediated by the recognitive relations they share with others. A comprehensive, normative epistemology must offer an account of the community which is engaged in epistemic practices.

Hegel's normative epistemology is developed to a significant extent as a response to the problem of the criterion. His strategy is to diagnose and resolve inconsistencies within alternative accounts of knowing and to show how resolution culminates in the self-critical practice of absolute knowing. Thus, a significant portion of my chapter is devoted to Hegel's confrontation with scepticism and the incorporation of scepticism into his method. I argue that absolute knowing should be interpreted non-metaphysically as a proto-pragmatist response to scepticism.

My discussion will proceed as follows. First, I discuss briefly Hegel's assault on immediacy. Since this topic has received extensive treatment in the literature, my concern is to show how the critique of immediacy advances his normative epistemology. I then explicate the structure of knowing embedded in forms of consciousness and indicate the way in which Hegel's analysis of knowing is informed by his confrontation with scepticism. Next I offer an overview of the "sociality" of knowledge, specifically the relation between justification and one's self-conception. I conclude with a brief discussion of absolute knowing and indicate some of its fallibilist elements.

Hegel's critique of immediacy

Hegel's assault on immediacy embraces epistemic justification of theoretical and practical claims,³ and involves empirical knowledge and self-knowledge. Immediacy is to be construed as direct, non-inferential, receptive awareness of what presents itself directly and ready-made to

consciousness, whether a sensed particular or an agent's expressed intention. As initially presented in Sense-certainty, immediate awareness is knowledge by acquaintance. One simply apprehends the object without assuming anything about it. With Force and Understanding, although the understanding uses its inferential abilities to get at the metaphysical core of the object behind the veil of perception, one still understands herself as apprehending that inner essence as something intrinsic to the object itself. The familiar lesson from these chapters in the *Phenomenology* is that knowledge is conceptually mediated: how one knows the object is mediated by what one takes the object to be. Furthermore, what one takes the object to be exercises putative authority in the way one ostensibly knows the object.

The decisive move in Hegel's argument occurs in the "Self-consciousness" chapter with the introduction of what I call the *reflection requirement* (RR): S is epistemically related to an object only if S takes herself to be so related. This is Kant's transcendental apperception thesis, which entails, Hegel argues, that concepts inform the entire content of experience and which introduces an internalist component into Hegel's epistemology. When applied to norms, RR reads: a norm *N* is rationally authoritative for *S* only if *S* takes *N* to be rationally authoritative. One's taking *N* to be rationally authoritative, however, is not sufficient for normative authority, just as an object is not simply what one takes it to be – after all, one can deploy concepts incorrectly. Correct deployment entails one's being able to recognize that her deployment is correct and that in turn entails that she must be capable of being proven wrong. She is proven wrong, not in her failure to map concepts onto the world, but rather by another self-conscious person. RR and proper deployment of concepts are mediated by the current consensus of the epistemic community, although this is a conclusion that emerges *fully* only in absolute knowing.⁴

Hegel's critique of immediacy extends throughout the *Phenomenology*. Each transition to a new form of consciousness contains residual elements of immediacy inherited from previous ways of knowing. A point often overlooked is that immediacy also concerns self-knowledge and justification of actions. Again, immediacy concerns anything, including norms, assumed as both directly accessible and ready-made *apart from* its mediation by communal practices. Consider the discussion of Rousseau's *Confessions* in the "Reason" chapter of the *Phenomenology*. The "law of the heart" is each individual's core selfhood which opposes oppressive social institutions and which is taken, from this standpoint, as the justificatory authority for actions. Vicky, for instance, has a justifying reason for acting if her action sincerely expresses her essential

self as *she directly grasps* it. A problem arises once her action enters the public domain and becomes susceptible to alternative construal by others. Vicky's inner self is expressed in *her* action, whereas another's interpretation of her action will express *his* essential selfhood. Here Hegel presents a more sophisticated version of the adjudication problem that emerged initially in the master-slave dialectic: what is taken as rationally authoritative is a norm lying outside the shared cognitive relations underwriting communal practices. Sincere expression of one's core selfhood is justificatory for acting, since it is a *universally* acknowledged justifying principle. But one's own assertion of an allegedly universal norm cannot be recognized by others in the essentially subjective form in which it is expressed and thus cannot be validated by them.⁵

The same problem arises for the "beautiful soul" in the concluding section of the "Spirit" chapter of the *Phenomenology*, yet in this case within the context of an attenuated form of mutual recognition. The "beautiful soul" replays the normative confusion of the Unhappy Consciousness (in the "Self-consciousness" chapter of the *Phenomenology*), but this time the oscillating standpoints lie within her perspective. She is to act dutifully from the conviction of conscience, yet in its abstract form the universal standard of conscience is whatever she says it is. Thus we have the corrupt standpoint of the romantic ironist who attempts to justify his acts by appeal to the *faux* sincerity of his conviction. The problem, again, is that immediacy blocks adjudication. One acts from the immediate self-certainty of conscience and one's acting from conviction is recognized by others as justificatory. Jones claims to act dutifully from sincere conviction, whereas Smith takes Jones's act as self-serving. Both perspectives claim to fulfil a universal norm in the context of mutual respect for conviction. Unresolved conflict ensues because recognition is incomplete; this type of community lacks a *critical* normative underwriter for its practices. The first step towards resolution is forgiveness and reconciliation. Once rational agents can see that the perspective of conviction is contingent and that mutual recognition requires an independent, communally vetted standard of normativity which mediates the claims of all individual perspectives, then we have the transition to the form of community which underwrites absolute knowing. The critique of immediacy is integral to Hegel's case for absolute knowing. Immediacy is a reliable symptom of failed epistemic practices.

Scepticism and the structure of justification

Hegel's mature epistemology emerges in the *Phenomenology* after a serious engagement with scepticism. His relationship to scepticism is

complicated, however, since he sharply criticizes (especially modern) scepticism and yet refers to his method as a “self-consummating scepticism” (*sich vollbringender Skeptizismus*; *PS* 50 = *W* 3:72).⁶ Hegel confronts scepticism with a two-part strategy: first, he shows that some key assumptions of (especially modern) scepticism are flawed – notably, the representational theory of mental activity – and that his own epistemology avoids these flaws; second and more importantly, he faces the challenge of the problem of the criterion directly and shows how his own method resolves the problem.

Hegel never questions the common sense assumption – what Flay calls the “natural attitude” – that we acquire knowledge. The issue is not whether any form of consciousness knows anything at all, but whether it knows *what it claims* to know rather than something else. He never questions the general reliability of our cognitive abilities,⁷ but he approaches scepticism seriously. The target of Hegel’s criticism of modern scepticism is a set of assumptions that together constitute the representationalist theory of the mind: (a) subjective and objective standpoints are distinct and separate with no natural bridge from the former to the latter; (b) the subjective standpoint is transparent and immediately accessible. Hegel rejects (a) because it absolutizes the perspective of the understanding (that knowing is separate from what it knows) and leads to the conclusion that knowledge is of something beyond experience. The task of knowledge is not the task of mapping one’s subjective representations onto an objective world. One is already situated in the world as a member of a historical community. It is noteworthy that what partly motivates Hegel’s rejection of Kant’s restriction of knowledge to phenomena is the realist precept that knowledge captures the *real* nature of what is.⁸ The case against (b) coincides with the attack on immediacy, namely, the attack upon the modern sceptic’s assumption that mental contents are psychological entities to which we have immediate and perhaps incorrigible access. Mental contents are taken as *given*, which is why the sceptic’s analysis of the mental presumes to add nothing to these contents. The first three chapters of the *Phenomenology* are a critique of representationalist accounts of mind and knowing, and their assumption that the mind is self-illuminated, although the last vestiges of representationalism are not removed until the “Religion” chapter (see Di Giovanni and Harris 1985: 317–18, 339).

A characteristic of immediacy is that it represents a one-sided, abstract perspective. The same holds for scepticism generally, since it simply exposes contradictions within whatever is given to it. Accordingly, scepticism is “contingent” and potentially arbitrary.⁹ Dialectic, by

contrast, exposes a *determinate* negation within a particular form of consciousness and the determinate negation (knowledge defeater) arises from concrete instances of incoherence in the experience of knowing (*LHP* 2:330–38; *PS* 50). Dialectic is not a sceptical method imposed upon positive assertions. It exposes inconsistencies arising naturally when a way of knowing fails to know what it claims to know. Exposing contradictions between the actual experience of knowing and what a form of knowing purports to know is precisely what scepticism attempts to accomplish – thus Hegel’s claim that dialectic incorporates scepticism.

This brings us to the problem of the criterion and how it motivates Hegel’s critique of ways of knowing. Hegel states the problem in compressed form as follows: a philosophical examination of whether a way of knowing actually yields knowledge presupposes a criterion by which to test the knowledge-claims of that way of knowing. Since no ready-made and justified criterion is available and thus no putative criterion can claim to be justified, the examination is impossible (*PS* 52). The problem is a form of the Agrippan dilemma: (a) any putative criterion requires justification which would presuppose an additional criterion and a regress ensues; (b) a legitimate criterion is arbitrarily assumed; (c) there is no criterion. Since (a), (b) and (c) are unacceptable, inquiry is impossible. But this falsely presupposes, Hegel argues, that the criterion is an external standard applied to a way of knowing to test whether it knows what it claims to know. Every form of consciousness has an internal justificatory authority or criterion – what it takes as rationally authoritative for justifying beliefs and actions – which its knowledge-claims must meet in order to be justified. The criterion is validated or invalidated by whether it can *function* as a standard for that way of knowing. To test whether what one takes as rationally authoritative really is authoritative does not involve going beyond any putative rational authority to ascertain what is authoritative in general and outside of all contexts (what is authoritative *überhaupt*). The comparison lies within consciousness between two distinct elements: what one takes as rationally authoritative and what can function as authoritative for that way of knowing. If the experience of knowing reveals that the two do not coincide, then we have a knowledge defeater; it follows that the rational authority and the form of knowing it allegedly underwrites must alter to remove the inconsistency.

The key move in Hegel’s strategy is the contention that knowledge cannot be assessed *überhaupt*. All knowing either results from or fails because of the epistemic practice of a *concrete* way of knowing by which a certain type of knower purports to acquire a certain type of

knowledge of a certain type of object. Together these form what Flay (1984) calls a “presupposition set” which structures every form of consciousness. The salient point is that all knowing is conceptually informed *and guided* by what the knower takes to be her object of knowledge – the description under which her object of knowledge falls – for instance, as a thing with properties, or a certain species within a biological classification. How the object is determined guides the knowledge expectations the knower has. Whether knowledge or a knowledge defeater results is determined by whether the knower’s expectations are confirmed or disconfirmed in the actual experience of knowing. For instance, is experience in Sense-certainty sensed experience of a particular?

A form of consciousness is ostensibly self-contained, meaning that no further presupposition is required for that way of knowing to account for what it professes to know. The structure of any form of knowing is composed of two sets of elements, one set concerning the object of knowledge and the other concerning the knower.¹⁰ The first set, concerning the object of knowledge, is composed of the following distinctions: (i) the knower’s concept of the object; (ii) the assumed mode of access to the object (e.g. sensation or rational inference); (iii) the actual experience of the object; and (iv) the actual object. How one experiences the object (iii) is supposedly determined by her conception of the object (i) in attempting to know the object (iv) by means of her presumed mode of access to the object (ii). As noted earlier, any way of knowing presupposes a certain self-conception deployed by the knower in her act of knowing, a self-conception which has the following structure – and which reflects the second set of distinctions: (a) one’s cognitive self-conception as an epistemic agent; (b) the actual cognitive self-experience she has when deploying concepts (i) in attempting to know an object (iv); and (c) one’s actual cognitive constitution and epistemic engagement themselves as directed towards objects (iv). One’s self-conception as an epistemic agent (a) – for instance, as a Baconian scientist classifying species – supposedly determines the cognitive self-experience (b) of one’s actual constitution as an epistemic agent (c). One further relation completes Hegel’s model. Recall that one’s concept of an object (i) and one’s presumed mode of access to the object (ii) are correlated with one’s self-conception as an epistemic agent (a). Knowledge-claims are justified or defeated *for* a specific form of consciousness. Justification consists in the functional *coherence* among the set of relations which comprise the way of knowing. Inconsistencies indicate defeaters and thus a concrete reason to doubt that the specific way of knowing actually knows what it claims to know. In the case of

failure, the conclusion is not that knowledge is impossible, but rather that the specific form of consciousness in question fails to justify that it knows what it claims to know *with the way of knowing that it deploys*.

Knowledge defeaters are detected when experience (iii) discloses an inconsistency between one's concept of the object (i) and the actual object (iv). Experience deviates from what one expected to discover based upon her concept of the object. Consider the epistemic subject in "Force and the Understanding". In this context, she attempts to use her inferential capacities to apprehend the metaphysical substratum underlying appearances, precisely because this is what she conceives the object of knowledge to be. Her experience about attempting to apprehend that substratum, however, discloses that what she took to be the metaphysical unity of appearances is actually the product of her own inferential capacities. There is a lack of fit between her concept of the object and what experience discloses about the actual object. What she expected to be the apprehended object turns out to be the product of her conceptual determination of the object. In order to remove the inconsistency, the object of knowledge, the presumed mode of access to the object and the self-conception of the epistemic subject must alter to conform to what experiencing the object discloses. As a result, the epistemic agent no longer sees herself as attempting to apprehend the object, but rather as a deployer of concepts – in this case, the *a priori* concept of a physical object – to comprehend the object. Knowledge henceforth will be conceptualized experience.¹¹

Knowledge defeaters arise because one's concept of the object is not properly differentiated – for instance, a thing with properties which must transition to a metaphysical substratum as a pure object of understanding. This is precisely what one's experience of the object (iv) discloses; the concept of the object is the source of the lack of fit. "Experience" in Hegel's technical vocabulary is awareness of the lack of fit between one's concept of the object and the object itself. Hegel, to be sure, does not provide an account of concept differentiation in the *Phenomenology*; that is the task of the *Logic*. The role that concept determination plays in his account of justification is central to his theory, however. One's concept of an object informs all experience including the revision of improperly determined concepts. This, of course, is Hegel's idealism thesis. Although concepts "go all the way out" and although ways of knowing are self-contained, the deployment of concepts within a form of consciousness is *indirectly* answerable to experience, which means that ways of knowing are not self-sufficient. Hegel assumes that, for instance, when experience of empirical objects deviates from what a way of knowing takes the object to be, the nature

of the object itself (iv) has impacted on one's experience of the object. Otherwise, how would one's experience deviate from what one expected given her concept of the object? As K. R. Westphal has observed, this indicates a significant externalist element in Hegel's epistemology (2003: 41). There is no non-conceptualized experience, but the actual world informs one's concepts. Experience motivates concept revision, which, however, is guided by concept deployment.

Concept deployment, viewed from a different angle, is limited because RR is mediated. A concept is neither what I determine it to be nor how a view from nowhere would construe it. A concept's meaning is determined by what *we* can justifiably infer when deploying the concept, where "we" refers to a *geistlich* epistemic community. This becomes clearer when we remind ourselves that Hegel's account of justification also concerns the reconciliation of particular and universal perspectives, especially when we note that there is no detached, universal perspective from which to justify knowledge-claims. Every universal perspective is historically situated and socially mediated.

Hegel's principal response to scepticism is to incorporate scepticism's critical practices into his method for evaluating ways of knowing. In sum, forms of consciousness undermine themselves and their self-correction transitions to a modified way of knowing. The dialectic continues until we reach the standpoint of absolute knowing whose self-critical practices are scepticism-resistant.

The sociality of knowledge

The sociality of knowledge is tied to what underwrites absolute knowing, namely, the mutually shared and acknowledged rational authority of recognitive relations governing the epistemic and social practices of a *geistlich* community. The sociality of knowledge is analysed exhaustively in Pinkard (1996). My discussion concerns justification for one's claim to *know* that she has a justifying reason for acting.

For Hegel, a normative theory of knowledge must account for justification of knowledge-claims and reasons for actions. Indeed, Hegel devotes much of the *Phenomenology* to the latter. As indicated earlier, how one justifies knowledge-claims and reasons for action presupposes a certain self-conception that is deployed when one argues, say, that what she did is justified. This brings to the forefront the rational authority of the epistemic agent: to what extent can she claim that her particular point of view informs the justifying authority of a universal norm? RR requires that one accept as rationally authoritative only what she takes as rationally authoritative. How her authority is

affirmed – and RR upheld – while nonetheless being mediated is the root issue in the sociality of knowing. What is important for our purposes is how one can claim to know that her reason for acting is justified. She does so, of course, by connecting her reason – her particular point of view – with a generally acknowledged universal norm. At issue is how she *knows* this norm as authoritative.

The sociality of knowing is a further assault on immediacy and the abstract view of epistemic agents that complements it. Consider mutually respected conviction of conscience (MRCC) as a failed means of justification. It is instantiated within the previously explicated structure of forms of consciousness as follows: S, understanding herself as (a) an agent acting from the immediate conviction of conscience to which she has (ii) direct intuitive access, offers a reason for her action by appealing to (i) mutual recognition and respect within the community for sincere conviction. She assumes that the conviction of conscience (i) is the actual norm (iv) whose authority will justify her action. S's action is justified if and only if the normative authority of (i) is the actual norm (iv) which can justify her action within this form of epistemic practice. The experience of justificatory practice, of course, discloses a defeater: (i) fails to correspond with (iv) in cases of disagreement over the status of S's reason. She contends that the sincere conviction of her conscience clearly justifies her action, whereas others maintain from the sincere conviction of their consciences that her action is not justified. She insists that they respect her conviction; they demand that she respect theirs. Neither she nor they can claim to *know* that their claims are justified, because neither she nor they can be proven wrong. The regnant norm (i) lacks the critical apparatus to adjudicate the dispute and provide reconciliation among S and others.

Although MRCC is an advanced form of incipient Spirit, its flaw lies principally in its abstract view of a rational agent. S appeals to a justifying norm that is communally constituted, yet in appealing to that norm she *acts* as though she were *independent* of any community. And she assumes that she has socially unmediated access to MRCC. The same holds for others who claim to know that S's reason fails to justify her action. Again, neither knowledge-claim is justifiable, since there is no means for their epistemic community to validate one of the claims in a way that is not purely contingent (e.g. accidental agreement). Failed alternative theories of justification, which Hegel calls “the way of despair” (PS 49), appeal, to varying extents, to justifying norms by circumventing how those norms are established and sustained within the full network of recognitive relations – including their recognized institutional embodiment – that underwrite a community's epistemic

practices. In sum, there is no socially unmediated access to a universal and thus justificatory point of view. One must justify her knowledge-claims *as* a rationally autonomous agent whose autonomy is mediated by her full participation in the community's practices.

Absolute knowing

Absolute knowing presents interpretive difficulties, because Hegel's account is, as is commonly acknowledged, incomplete and formulaic. Hegel's primary focus seems to be the self-awareness one has as a participant in what I have called a *geistlich* epistemic community. In absolute knowing, "substance" has finally become "subject". What he means is that one fully understands *how* RR is mediated *and* affirmed; that is, she sees how her rational authority is affirmed within the network of recognitive relations which underwrite communal practices and whose authority she understands herself and others to have come to take – indeed, establish – as the properly exercising normative authority for justificatory practices. What has occurred in absolute knowing is the synthesis of all components of the overall background network of normativity for thought and action ("substance") within the conscious awareness of the epistemic agent. Hegel shows how these components arose from historically situated and now superseded forms of consciousness. The form of consciousness that is absolute knowing is the comprehensive inner working of these elements, a chief component of which is one seeing herself as part of a community that understands itself as having come to establish this shape of normativity as authoritative for belief and action (*PS* 487). What was adumbrated at the end of the "Unhappy Consciousness" section – universality in particularity (I that is We) and particularity in universality (We that is I) – has reached fruition in the modern community. One sees the authority of her own standpoint as mediated by the consensus of the community, while also seeing that the community's agreement about what is authoritative for its practices is receptive to her own particular standpoint. This description of one's self-conception within the context of absolute knowing is a constituent of an account of justification implicit, though regretfully attenuated, in the *Phenomenology's* final chapter.

Put succinctly, spirit itself is the normative authority for absolute knowing. It embodies clearly a central theme in Hegel's normative epistemology: normative authority underwriting communal epistemic practices is internal to those practices. How does spirit underwrite absolute knowing as a successful and scepticism-resistant epistemic practice? Pippin (1989: 247) argues that absolute knowing is a

movement or process that involves self-conscious reflection about the process – that is, I add, the function of justificatory practices within the community – rather than a terminal endpoint. Spirit is that network of recognitive relations, including their institutional embodiment, which underwrites epistemic practices and *whereby* epistemic agents engage in ongoing critical reflection on those practices. The consensus emerging from these self-critical practices is the authoritative norm to which the community appeals to justify its knowledge-claims. In this sense, Hegel's epistemology is proto-pragmatist; communal consensus is truth-indicative.¹² Communal consensus is the stable, yet defeasible and fallibilist, convergence of the community's self-critical reflection on its epistemic practices. Spirit is thus entirely self-mediating and it is in this sense that absolute knowing should be understood as "complete".

Absolute knowing is thus a scepticism-resistant epistemic practice. Its fallibilism promotes that resistance. If communal consensus of a *geistlich* community is what that community takes as authoritative (i) for its justificatory practices, it will always coincide with what actually justifies knowledge-claims (iv), precisely because communal consensus has the flexibility to remain answerable to the community's experience of its epistemic practices. The structural coherence of absolute knowing, as a way of knowing, is assured. In his Jena scepticism essay, Hegel had suggested that reason was immune from some of Sextus's tropes, because it did not attempt to ground knowledge in something external to the structure of knowing (Di Giovanni & Harris 1985: 40–42). This is precisely the case with absolute knowing.

Hegel was convinced that absolute knowing was the most stable and efficient form of knowing that philosophical analysis of knowledge could defend. It is that theory towards which the resolution of defeated and superseded accounts have, in Hegel's story, inexorably led and whose justification is secured only by the elimination of alternative theories and by its flexibility to respond effectively to possible defeaters.¹³

Notes

- 1 In this respect, Hegel departs significantly from the modern epistemological tradition from Descartes to Carnap for whom the possibility of knowledge is assessed independently of the attempt to obtain knowledge.
- 2 This point has been argued vigorously by Pinkard (1996). My indebtedness to his work will be clear.
- 3 Epistemology, for Hegel, concerns justification for claims of empirical knowledge and reasons for action. The latter concerns the agent's intention (the description under which she insists that her action fall) and her reasons for executing that intention. Although Hegel's theory of action has a decidedly

epistemic dimension and is developed in part as a critique of immediacy, its assessment is beyond the scope of this essay.

- 4 A version of this argument construing concept deployment as rule-following has been defended by Landry (2008). Here is the problem: if, from the standpoint of Desire, an object is solely what S takes it to be, then S's determination is always seemingly correct. Applied to rule-following, this means that there is no distinction between S's following a rule and her seeming to do so (an application of Wittgenstein's private language argument) and thus no distinction between correct and incorrect rule-following. If it is impossible for S to see herself as erring, then she cannot subsume an object under rules. An external standard of adjudication is needed and the initial move in that direction is recognition by another.
- 5 " ... the *particular* content of the heart *as such* is supposed to have the status of a universal. Consequently, others do not find in this content the fulfilment of the law of *their* hearts, but rather that of someone else; and, precisely in accordance with the universal law that each shall find in what is law *his* own heart, they turn against the reality *he* set up, just as he turned against theirs" (PS 224).
- 6 For a thorough analysis of Hegel's relation to scepticism, see Di Giovanni and Harris (1985) and Forster (1989). Claesges (1996: 134) contends that Hegel's method itself is sceptical. Pinkard (1996: 16) intimates something similar. In this chapter, I remain neutral on whether Hegel's method itself is or is not sceptical.
- 7 Flay (1984: 39) sees Hegel's reliabilism and his acceptance of the natural attitude as indicating that Hegel distances himself from scepticism. This is generally true regarding modern scepticism, but false concerning the problem of the criterion.
- 8 Accordingly, I reject Rockmore's (2005) claim that Hegel's internal turn to analyses of forms of consciousness indicates Hegel's renunciation of grasping the "in-itself" of the world. Rockmore's claim is a truism, however, if one reads Hegel (and I do not) as a type of constructionist and the "in-itself" as something metaphysical (which neither Hegel nor I do).
- 9 Note the often-quoted passage from Hegel (PS 125–26) where Hegel compares equipollence arguments to the behaviour of bickering children.
- 10 My analysis borrows significantly, although with some supplementation and modification, from the table of distinctions in K. R. Westphal (1989: 92–93) and especially K. R. Westphal (2003: 41–44).
- 11 The new object of knowledge that emerges from the "Force and the Understanding" chapter actually doesn't appear until the beginning of the "Reason" chapter. What emerges from the "Force and the Understanding" chapter is the nature of self-consciousness as expressed in RR, and in its immediacy RR is taken as exclusive and unmediated. Hegel exposes the incoherence of that one-sided perspective in the "Self-consciousness" section in terms of universal and particular standpoints. Once a form of consciousness emerges (Reason) in which the conflict between standpoints can be reconciled at least in a preliminary way – that is, a way in which the particular can raise itself to the universal (a preliminary way in which concepts actually can, to some extent, determine objects) – the object of knowledge becomes natural law.
- 12 As K. R. Westphal (2003: 45–46) emphasizes, justification, for Hegel, strongly indicates, without entailing, truth. I only claim that Hegel has a

communal consensus account of justification. I do not claim that his theory of truth is communal consensus.

- 13 I acknowledge a tension between Hegel's communal consensus account of justification and the *Logic's* standpoint that conceptual structures are not answerable to possible contrary empirical evidence. The issue of this tension, however, cannot be addressed within the context of the present chapter.

2 Metaphysics

Nathan Ross

Metaphysics is the form of philosophy that seeks to give us knowledge of the fundamental nature of reality purely through conceptual arguments. It is more than a mere branch of philosophy; indeed, it has often been known as the core of philosophy, *prima philosophia*, because it lays out the basic foundational concepts that determine our paradigmatic understanding of the world. Metaphysics deals with those objects that we cannot hope to know through experience: the nature and existence of God, the unity and duration of the soul, the origin of the world and its limits in space and time, just to list a few classic metaphysical lines of inquiry. At the same time, metaphysics deals not only with these grand objects that transcend all possible experience, but also with the concepts and structures that shape our experience and our philosophical arguments: for example, to say that all things have a cause, or that matter is infinitely divisible involves making general determinations, using conceptual argumentation, in a way that has far-reaching impacts on how we experience the world, how we do science and how we understand our place in the world.

How is metaphysical knowledge possible?

If philosophy has always had metaphysical questions and commitments at its core, then it is one of the distinguishing features of the modern era, starting in the eighteenth century, to take a highly sceptical, critical attitude towards the very possibility of ever having affirmative, definitive metaphysical knowledge. With the rise of empirical sciences and better methods for answering questions about nature through experimentation, philosophers attacked the possibility of gaining knowledge where no concrete experience is possible. David Hume (1711–76) gives perhaps the most radically sceptical challenge to the

metaphysical tradition, showing that we cannot behold the “inner powers” of things and that we can have only relative, probable knowledge of cause and effect based on our experiences. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) takes a deeply critical approach to the metaphysical tradition, showing that, although we can use concepts to make definitive claims about what we experience, we get into trouble when we use these same concepts in a way that transcends all possible experience. Although we can gain relatively certain knowledge of what caused a ball to fall off a table, we involve ourselves in irresolvable difficulties when we seek to understand what caused the world to come into existence. In Kant’s view, we fall into the trap of metaphysical thinking because of a kind of “illusion” at the heart of human reason: we have an innate ability to structure our experiences in terms of cause and effect, substance and accident and other conceptual operations, but we also inevitably wonder how these concepts apply to the world as a whole. This leads us into what Kant calls antinomies, disputes about metaphysical questions for which there are conflicting, equally binding solutions that cannot be proven.

Indeed, Hegel sees this diminution of metaphysical knowledge as one of the strongest tendencies and greatest shortcomings of the late modern era: “In that science and common sense both work together to bring about the dissolution of metaphysics, it seems to have led to the remarkable spectacle of an *educated civilization without metaphysics*, much like an otherwise richly decorated temple lacking in an altar” (*W* 5:14). He takes account of Kant’s work to limit the speculative pretensions of metaphysical reason and of the ground lost to metaphysics due to the rising power of scientific methods of investigation, but believes it must be possible to refine and redevelop our capacity for metaphysical knowledge. Just because the range and methodical rigour of our empirical sciences has grown, it does not mean that we must turn away from those thoughts, problems and ideals that represent the territory of metaphysics, nor does he believe that we should merely embrace a leap of faith in all matters not covered by science.¹ Depending on how one regards its success, Hegel’s *Science of Logic* is either the last great failed attempt to construct a metaphysical system in the history of philosophy, or it is the first truly modern method of metaphysics that takes seriously the demands of modern critical thought that we not merely project our unformed thoughts onto the nature of reality. He believes that a deep investigation of the concepts that we use to think will result not only in a sense of their limitations, but that it will give us knowledge of how these very concepts structure the nature of reality.

Dialectical logic as metaphysics

Hegel's *Science of Logic* is a bold attempt to redefine logic so that it no longer involves merely examining the forms of arguments, in isolation from their truth content, but the actual nature of concepts and hence the ultimate nature of reality. Before Hegel, Kant gives the idea of transcendental logic in his *Critique of Pure Reason* as a catalogue of the sum total of *a priori* thought functions that we use to cognize the world. In this way, Kant's transcendental logic teaches us what it means to make claims about causality, substance and negation, and also teaches us when we are justified in making such claims (i.e. it goes beyond merely examining the form of valid inferences). But Hegel takes the logical enterprise further in that he undertakes to investigate not merely the nature of innate human thought categories, but the nature of *objective thought* itself. While Kant believes that our thoughts have a certain universal form that applies to all human knowledge, but not necessarily to the things themselves, Hegel means to show that if our thoughts are true, it is because they take part in the conceptual structure of reality. Thus he argues that "this logical science makes up the actual metaphysics or the true speculative science" (*W* 5:16), for it will go beyond the limitations of specific human thoughts and discover the objective nature of thought determinations. For Hegel, rational thought is not merely a property of the human mind, but is based in a set of objective structures that shape reality. He gives a striking, but audacious metaphor for his logic, in claiming that it "depicts God, as he is in his eternal nature, before the creation of nature and of the finite human mind" (*W* 5:44). While it might seem remarkable that Hegel would identify his own thought experiment with the inner workings of the divine intellect, this metaphor means to provoke us to think about the fact that thoughts are not merely a human creation, since there are certain conceptual functions that transcend different languages and ultimately seem embedded in the objective structure of reality.² When our thoughts truly have an *a priori* necessity, as they do in the case of certain mathematical and logical relations, we feel that our thoughts have an objectivity that transcends even that of physical facts. Thus Hegel's metaphysics works to determine those thoughts that have a pure, rational necessity, as well as to show how these thoughts develop in such a way as to generate other thought figures. To engage in metaphysical logic means to "present the realm of thought philosophically, in its own immanent activity, or what is the same, in its necessary development" (*W* 5:19).

Hegel proposes a rigorous and consistent method for examining the objective nature of thought: nothing must be assumed from the

outside world or as a mere fact of the human mind;³ the logic must deduce, that is, rigorously prove the need for, each of its thoughts; and in the process of deducing each thought, Hegel argues that we will discover an inherent contradiction that leads to further thought categories. This represents the most basic and rigorous articulation of Hegel's *dialectical method*, which he uses in all of his philosophical works. (Thus Hegel thinks of the *Science of Logic* as the argumentative justification of the philosophical method that he uses in his other works to make claims about specific applied areas of philosophy, such as ethics, politics, natural science or history.) The method is dialectical, in that it examines thoughts in such a way as to reveal their inner meaning and thus also reveals their own contradiction, much like Socrates seeks to start with the thoughts of interlocutors and draw out contradictions so as to advance their thinking. However, Hegel's dialectical method works not only to destroy or negate a thought by reducing it to contradiction; indeed, Hegel believes that when we prove a thought to have some contradiction, we show not just that it is not fully true, but we show what about it must be different. He finds that in a philosophical argument, each negation must be a *determinate negation*: it must show what about a given thought *is* and what *is not*, and in so doing it leads to a new thought content. Thus the dialectical method is not merely used in a sceptical manner to clean away false thoughts, but is used to generate in a rigorous, methodical way new thoughts. In Hegel's metaphysical thought, contradiction is not merely a feature of some erroneous human thoughts, but a problematic and yet fruitful feature of reality; it is the "living principle" of finite reality (*W* 6:76). To follow Hegel's metaphor of the logic as God's mind, we might claim that even God thinks in contradictions, evidenced by the fact that the real world consists of certain necessary and universal contradictions. Thus Hegel's logical method consists in three interlocking features: (a) it starts with some form of *immediacy* (a being or thought that has not yet been mediated by thought), (b) then it works *dialectically* (it shows a contradiction specific to the initial thought), and (c) finally it has a result that is *speculative* (a new thought is constructed by taking account of the contradiction). Hegel believes that his dialectical method is different from that of ancient sceptics and uniquely suited to generate a doctrine of metaphysical knowledge in that he emphasizes the connection between the negativity of the dialectical moment and the creative potential of the speculative moment. Of course, as soon as the speculative moment is examined in its own right, it leads to a new form of immediacy, which must once again be submitted to logical scrutiny. (Thus some claim that the greatest inconsistency of Hegel's

dialectical works is that they end with some moment such as absolute knowing, in which no more dialectical critique is possible.)

In a sense, Hegel's dialectical method of constructing a metaphysical system represents a radical reinterpretation of Kant's antinomies of pure reason. Kant seeks to show that our metaphysical knowledge is doomed to failure because it leads us into contradictory positions that cannot be resolved by evidence.⁴ In metaphysics we make claims not about determinate things, but about the absolute, that is, about the sum total of all things. But in thinking about the absolute, we arrive at contradictory notions of what it must be like. Thus, for example, Kant argues there are equally compelling reasons to believe that the universe must start at a specific point in time as there are to believe that it must have always existed. But Hegel finds it compelling that Kant treats each of these antinomies not merely as historical disagreements that come up in philosophy, but as necessary features of human reasoning: because of the very way we think about causality and time, we find compelling reasons for both sides of the antinomy. Hegel writes in praise of Kant: "This thought, that the contradiction which is posited by the determinations of the understanding is *essential* and *necessary*, has to be considered one of the most important and profound advances of the philosophy of modern times" (*EnLogic* 92–93). This necessary and intractable nature of the antinomies is no accident for Hegel; it shows that the antinomies have a truth to them that must be harnessed to produce a method of metaphysical speculation. Hegel radicalizes Kant's position by arguing that the contradictions in our attempts to define the nature of absolute reality are not merely a result of human error, but features of absolute reality itself. "But [Kant] did not carry through his insight on the antinomies to its conclusion because of the misunderstanding that it is merely reason that falls into contradiction; he does not understand that the moment of contradiction is the raising of reason above the limitations of the understanding and the dissolution of the same" (*W* 5:39). Indeed, for Hegel there are not merely four antinomies, but there are antinomies, or contradictions, in each concept that is used to describe the absolute nature of reality. While Kant saw the antinomies as a critique of our metaphysical pretensions, Hegel believes that antinomical thinking can lead to metaphysical knowledge if we can learn to recognize the *progressive order* within the antinomies, the way in which our contradictory conceptions of the absolute being lead beyond themselves and define the absolute in a progressively richer manner.

It should be clear that Hegel's metaphysical positions, as developed in the *Science of Logic*, have a provisional quality; each thought form

represents a definition of the absolute and insofar as it is taken as absolute, it will involve contradictions that lead to a new definition of the absolute. But even these provisional definitions have truth if taken in context, despite their contradictory features, because they partake in the objective quality of thought, revealing contradictions that actually shape the world. The true absolute would only be the sum total of all definitions of the absolute, taken along with their dialectical critique.

Examples, positions

It is not possible here to produce a complete summary of Hegel's *Science of Logic* and, indeed, it is also impossible to detach a set of results from Hegel's metaphysical enterprise, since he argues that the results of any dialectical argument are only true through an awareness of the work done to arrive at them. But in what follows, I will seek to give a sense of Hegel's contributions to the discipline of metaphysics by illustrating how he applies his method to the refinement of a few key categories.

Being, nothing and becoming

If Hegel's logic is to represent objective thought and not merely a description of the contents of consciousness, then it must start with a thought that has the quality of *immediacy*. This means a thought content that is completely simple, that does not assume anything, that is not the result of any experience or reflection. He proposes the notion of pure being as such a thought. By pure being he means just something that merely is, that does not have any quality, any relationship, any determination. But he notes that to think of being in this way, as something purely immediate, is the same as to think *nothing*. This is the first contradiction that he discovers in his logic, that the notion of pure being is the same as nothing. However, Hegel argues that what is really at the heart of this contradiction is a movement of thought itself; in thinking the absolute as pure being, being disappears and becomes nothing. This movement is what Hegel calls *becoming*. "Their truth is this *movement* of immediate disappearance of one within the other: *becoming*; a movement in which each is different, but in which their difference also immediately disappears" (*W* 5:83). Thus the speculative result of this first contradiction is the idea of becoming. What Hegel is trying to demonstrate here is a basic theme in his philosophy; if we start with any object that is purely immediate, which does not contain any reflection or relation, we will find that the object is not really as

simple as its initial definition. He is arguing, in a manner that draws from Heraclitus, that what we take for fixed, given being is actually filled with dynamism, caught up in a state of becoming that results precisely from the effort to pin it down. He means to show that a very basic conceptual contradiction, such as that between pure being and nothingness, is actually a result of a movement of thought, a restlessness that makes up the basic quality of all being. Of course, Hegel argues that once we try to think not of pure being, but of a specific being, we must think both what something is and what it is not, and so we bring together being and nothingness in a way that results in a *something*, a finite thing with certain qualities.

The finite and the infinite

One of the basic goals of Hegel's metaphysics is to challenge the way in which we use familiar conceptual dichotomies to frame our understanding of the world. Any dichotomy consists of two opposite terms that define one another, are dependent on one another, even if they are completely opposed. If we do not grasp the dichotomy as an act of thought, then we risk positing a real, ontological distinction where there is actually just a complex relational movement. One particularly fatal dichotomy that Hegel sees in metaphysical thought is the spurious distinction between finite and infinite being.

We might start with two innocent sounding metaphysical propositions: *all being is finite*; and *the finite is different than the infinite*. It might be noted, incidentally, that these propositions recur throughout philosophical thinking in a variety of contexts, from theology to existentialism: I might say that everything in the world is finite in order to distinguish the world from God; or I might say that all minds are finite in order to grasp the limitations of the mind; or I might claim that finitude is an irreducible feature of the human condition.

Now in saying that something is finite, I am saying that it has a limit, that there is a point at which it ceases to be what it is, whether in space or in time. When the thing reaches its limit, it ceases to be what it is and becomes something different. Thus finite being is being that has a limit or a negation at its heart. Hegel does not dispute that there is finite being; in fact, he regards the ability to grasp the limits of material objects and of human life as one of the basic conditions for philosophical understanding. However, he finds a basic contradiction in the statement that everything is finite: for to say that everything is finite is at once to make the notion of the finite into the infinite. It is in Hegel's view the very nature of finite being that it ceases to exist, that it

passes over into something different. And yet to try to think of finitude as a total horizon of being, an irreducible and unavoidable condition, to say that there is only finite being, is to totalize a concept that only makes sense in a relative context. At the same time, Hegel objects to the notion that the finite is separate from the infinite, that finite being and infinite being are two different realms that do not overlap in any way. He calls this way of defining the infinite the “bad infinite”. Instead, he argues that the infinite only makes sense as a boundary concept of the finite: the infinite is the ultimate truth of all finite being; the true infinite is that which the finite being becomes in reaching its own dissolution. Indeed, he points to another spurious contradiction within any absolute opposition between finite and infinite being: to say that the infinite is completely separate from the finite is already to place a limit on the infinite and to make it into one limited thing among others.

Interpreters of Hegel, both sympathetic and hostile, have often come to the conclusion that Hegel’s conception of the dynamic, integral relation between finite and infinite being means that he must be a pantheist, believing that God and world are one. Indeed, the charge of being a Spinozist was enough to sink an academic career in Hegel’s time and his professional opponents often sought to connect him to such a “heretical” position. However, we should note that the above argument about the “bad infinite” only tells us what the absolute is not: God cannot be taken as a fixed, infinite being in complete separation from the world. However, Hegel sought to show that this position does not necessarily place him at odds with Christian theology, according to which God is spirit in a dynamic relation with the world of human finite spirit.

The reality of contradiction

As noted above, Hegel regards contradiction as a central methodological device in his logic. Unlike the ancient sceptics, Hegel does not seek out contradictions in order merely to disprove a thought and reduce us to a state of *aporia*. Instead, he believes that the contradictions that we discover in reflecting on the basic categories of thought reveal meta-physical truths. The contradiction between being and nothingness (that pure being is actually pure nothingness) leads to the notion that becoming underlies all static being. The contradiction between the finite and the infinite (that the finite does not exist when taken in an absolute sense) leads to the insight that the true infinite inheres in the finite.

It might seem that these contradictions are only a result of Hegel’s method, which seeks them out. But he argues that contradictions

actually have a metaphysical reality; in fact, he even believes that in order to understand any rational whole, it is necessary to seek out its contradictory features by showing how some essential distinctions are actually oppositional in structure. For example, to say that the father is different from the son is not yet a contradiction, but merely a difference, but to say that the father is only a father because of the son raises the definitional difference to a point where we see that it is constituted by opposition. Hegel's position represents a stark challenge to the traditional logical understanding of contradictions: the principle of contradiction states that we cannot attribute contradictory attributes to a subject, that a contradiction cannot be true. Thus as a matter of procedure, most philosophers would argue that when we discover a contradiction, there must be some error involved, that the contradiction is only found in our erroneous thoughts, not in reality.

Hegel illustrates the metaphysical reality of contradiction through a discussion of Zeno's paradox. The ancient dialecticians argued that motion from one point to another must be impossible, since an analysis of motion implies (ultimately) that the same thing must be taken at the same time as at two different points, thus involving contradiction. But Hegel points out that the real effect of this argument is not to convince us that motion is impossible, but that the principle of contradiction cannot describe the reality of motion: "We must grant the ancient dialecticians the contradictions that they demonstrate to be involved in motion, but from this does not follow that motion does not exist, but rather that motion is the existing contradiction" (*W* 6:76). Hegel goes on to argue that contradiction makes up the "living principle" or "drive" in reality; in that something is both itself and not itself, it has a negativity and this negativity means that it must develop or change. Thus while Hegel insists on the metaphysical reality of contradictions, he also insists on their resolution: where there is a contradiction, there is change, development, the passing away of one form in engendering another. Hegel's position on the reality of contradictions and their dissolution is not only a guiding thought in Hegel's logic, but also in his philosophy of nature as well as his political philosophy; indeed, the notion that society has to be grasped as a real, evolving contradictory structure becomes one of the guiding thoughts in the social theory of Karl Marx.

The limits of substance

Hegel's *Science of Logic* seeks to construct a metaphysical system by working through progressively more developed notions of the absolute.

A rich tradition that Hegel takes up is the early modern concept of substance, which he finds most thoroughly developed in Spinoza's philosophy. Hegel acknowledges that the notion of substance offers a more adequate and powerful interpretation of the absolute than the dialectic of finite and infinite being; instead of an absolute that is rigidly distinct from finite being, Spinoza interprets the absolute as substance and all finite being, all phenomena in general, as accidents or modifications that occur within this substance. The absolute substance and the finite things are not two separate realities; indeed, the absolute is to be regarded more as a kind of permanence underlying all change, an order underlying all contingency, a necessity underlying all events. While individual things might seem to be separate, their separation is only contingent and temporary; to have true knowledge of them is to see them as part of a common matrix of lawful alteration. In Spinoza's philosophy, the substance that makes up the sum total of all things is ultimately synonymous with God, since the divine is not outside of the world, but merely an absolute or completely true grasp of the natural world.

While this notion of substance as the truth of accidents seems to play into Hegel's point about the unity of finite and infinite being, he takes issue with this notion of substance. He writes as early as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that "the True" must be taken to be just as much subject as substance (PS 10), a cryptic statement that he grounds more deeply in his critique of the notion of substance in the *Science of Logic*. Ultimately, Hegel argues that Spinoza takes the logic of substance to a kind of fatal extreme by interpreting God as a kind of immanent, impersonal necessity underlying the change and dissolution of all finite things. Not only does such a God stand in contrast to the spiritual, personal God of Christian theology; in Hegel's view, this notion of absolute substance deprives metaphysical thinking of one of its most basic features, namely its conceptual, thinking structure. "The truth of substance is its relation of *necessity*; but in this way, it is only *internal necessity*; in that this necessity posits itself, it becomes *manifest* or *posited identity*, and hence *freedom*, which is the identity of the concept" (W 6:251). For Hegel, the True is to be taken not merely as substance but as subject, in that conceptual thought provides a richer conception of the absolute than Spinoza's substance. In the logic of substance, the absolute is a hidden force in things, a necessity with which they can never really identify. In conceptual thought, the subject is a universal that encompasses particularity. Insofar as I have the ability to think, I can grasp what is happening to me and in this act of understanding my limitations, I gain a higher freedom. The structure

of conceptual thought is ultimately freedom, in the sense of self-determination. Of course, Hegel does not mean the freedom of the particular will here; he agrees with Spinoza that actual people may find themselves determined by their emotions and by physical causes in the way that he describes. He merely disagrees with Spinoza that the absolute being, God, is to be grasped in its final form as a substance, finding that the structure of conceptual thought allows for a richer understanding of how reason finds itself embodied in reality. This critical engagement with Spinoza comes at a crucial point in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, standing on the threshold of the final section, the doctrine of the concept; ultimately, the goal of Hegel's metaphysics is to grasp the absolute not as being, nor as substance, but as thought. For Hegel, the highest form of thought is the idea.

Hegel's absolute idealism

Hegel's argument about the false dichotomy between finite and infinite is meant to set up his further metaphysical speculation; any argument about the nature of the absolute must grasp the limits or the negation in any thought in such a way as not to establish a dichotomy between the absolute and the finite. His critical engagement with Spinoza's notion of the absolute as an all-encompassing substance leads to the insight that the absolute being must be taken as free, self-positing thought. He argues that all true philosophy is concerned in some manner with pointing out the limitations of finite being. The infinite or the absolute is only real as a kind of pattern or *logos* within the finite, a truth behind the becoming and change within the world. Indeed, he calls his own philosophy absolute idealism in just this sense:

Every philosophy is essentially idealism, or at least has such as its principle. The same can be said of religion: for religion just as little grasps finitude as true being, as something final, absolute, as something unposited, uncreated, eternal. The antithesis of idealistic and realistic philosophy is thus without meaning. A philosophy that attributes true, final absolute being to finite existence does not deserve the name.

(*W* 5:172)

Hegel's position is not that finite or material things do not exist; nor does he believe in the kind of subjective idealism that holds that all of our thoughts or perceptions are real in a way that physical objects are not. Instead, his thesis on objective thought means to argue that what

is more real than any finite thing is the negativity of thought, that is, that there is an objective or true grasp of the world, which possesses the highest reality. He believes that philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza and Kant have all been engaged in understanding both the limitation of finite reality and the nature of the absolute.

Hegel's *Science of Logic* culminates in the notion that the absolute is a subject, is pure thought that gains insight into all its internal contradictions. His notion that absolute reality is to be found in the idea, or in a divine intellect, might call to mind the neo-Platonic tradition. However, his conception of thought as freedom is deeply informed by his engagement with Kant. Hegel credits the Kantian argument on the unity of apperception from the *Critique of Pure Reason* with the insight that thinking is not a substance but a self-founding activity. Thus Hegel writes that it "... belongs to the deepest insights of the critique of reason that the unity that makes up the essence of the concept is recognized as the unity of the 'I think'" (*W* 5:254); and he credits Kant's ethical philosophy with the insight that freedom is to be found not in detachment from all limitations, but in the positing of one's own limitations. However, Hegel once again goes against the basic intent of Kant's philosophy in that he interprets this insight into the nature of subjectivity not merely as a boundary against the possibility of metaphysical knowledge, but as an insight into why the absolute must be interpreted not as being or as substance, but as pure subjectivity.

Notes

- 1 In fact, Hegel often found that advances in the physical sciences could lead to logical refinements that would be of use in metaphysical inquiry. He notes how the scientific doctrine of polarity discovered in his time involved a new way of thinking about contradictions as causing action, thus invalidating the old philosophical bias that contradictions could not have any reality. While he believed that metaphysical questions could not be resolved through empirical experiments, he held that the sciences might require us to change the way that we use concepts to understand reality. Thus in his metaphysical thought he frequently draws analogies to new discoveries in the natural sciences.
- 2 Indeed, Hegel regarded his *Science of Logic* as a fallible attempt to formulate pure metaphysical thought categories, as witnessed by his life-long revision of the text of the *Science of Logic*. But the fallibility of Hegel's own work on the *Science of Logic* need not necessarily invalidate the ontological thesis that there are some arguments that possess the kind of objectivity that Hegel advocates, just as the fallibility of scientific knowledge does not invalidate the possibility of using the scientific method.

- 3 Hegel argues that the *Science of Logic* begins where the *Phenomenology of Spirit* ends. The latter works through the forms of finite consciousness, showing the various ways in which we experience the object of knowledge as something foreign. Each form of consciousness involves a separation between the subject and the object of knowledge. However, Hegel believes that the result of the *Phenomenology* is to show that each of these forms of consciousness ultimately gives way to another and finally to a mode of “absolute knowing” in which there is no distinction between the subject and object of knowledge. This phenomenology represents a kind of preparation for the logic by eliminating the prejudices that might interfere with the method of pure thought.
- 4 In Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, the antinomies are not the only form of metaphysical illusion. Kant also presents the paralogism of pure reason and the ideal of pure reason. The antinomies are the form of metaphysical illusion that arises out of trying to think the nature of reality as something infinite or absolute. For Hegel, the Kantian antinomies take on a special role in setting up his own philosophical method, because of the way that they anticipate the contradictory structure of his own dialectical thought and because Hegel’s metaphysics is especially concerned with the attempt to think the “absolute” as a specific thought.

3 Philosophy of mind

John Russon

Though many different specific studies compose the contemporary academic study called “philosophy of mind”, this area of philosophy is most fundamentally understood as a branch of metaphysics, a branch, that is, of the study of the nature of existence. Most basically, philosophy of mind recognizes that we *experience* mental life, or, more broadly, “consciousness”, but puzzles over how this relates to the bodily world that we take to be paradigmatically “real”. Most basically, the question this puzzle poses has led to three alternative answers, all fundamentally unsatisfactory: either the existence of the mind is assimilated to bodily reality – “reductive materialism” – the existence of bodies is assimilated to conscious experience – “subjective idealism” – or mind and body are asserted to be fundamentally different kinds of reality – “dualism”. These answers are unsatisfactory because they either deny essential dimensions of our reality, misrepresenting the autonomy of our mental life in reductive materialism or misrepresenting the inescapable externality and materiality of our existence in subjective idealism, or offer a logically untenable position in a dualism that practically cannot account for the *relation* of mind and body because, at a basic conceptual level, it cannot even be articulated coherently.¹ The challenge to contemporary philosophy of mind is to correlate a satisfactory account of what it is to be real with a satisfactory account of how we experience. It is precisely this dual task that is carried out in Hegel’s two major works, the *Science of Logic* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Through consideration of these works, we will see how Hegel’s philosophy can be a significant voice in conversation with contemporary work in philosophy of mind that stresses the themes of non-reductive physicalism and emergence.

Physicalism

There is no doubt that the prevailing view in contemporary philosophy of mind is “physicalism”. Most basically, this is the view that

“everything is physical”, or, what is often treated as equivalent, “everything is material”. The interpretation of these notions, though, is somewhat varied and there are thus different “physicalisms”.

The most basic sort of physicalism, and probably the one most amateur philosophers struggle with from their earliest encounters with philosophy, is the idea that everything is “really” matter – an idea that is expressed as if we (obviously) knew what we meant in saying it. The basic intuition here is that everything participates in reality and, as such, is “made of” the same (kind of) “stuff”. Indeed, being made of this stuff is, ultimately, just what it means to “be real”, to “exist”. Starting from this view that the so-called “external world” is real and that this means it is the totality of things made of matter, we are then confronted with the problem of explaining our experience: our consciousness, our self-consciousness, our ability to imagine, our ability to reason, our ability to choose. All of these characteristics of experience seem decidedly *non-material*. This most basic form of physicalism thus construes our experience as an essentially deceptive appearance, a non-autonomous, causal *effect* of the world of matter and hence an aspect of reality ultimately explainable by and reducible to the reality of matter.

Most contemporary physicalism, however, is not of this sort. Physicalism (which is itself an independent philosophical position, not automatically related to the philosophy of mind) tends to be very tightly integrated with theoretical work in the natural sciences – physics in particular – and the prevailing philosophical concept of what is “physical” itself largely takes its cue, so to speak, from contemporary concepts in physics. One of the most significant ways in which the meaning of “physical” is currently construed in a way that differs from the “it’s all matter” view is the recognition that the physical universe itself operates according to various principles (which physicists try to capture in their articulation of physical laws, such as the law of gravity) and these principles are not themselves matter, but something more like the immanent organization of matter.² What is physical, then, is “matter” understood as, roughly, the primitive fabric of things that behaves according to the principles that scientists discover to be the laws of the universe.³

Nature – physical reality – is thus precisely that which operates according to its own terms, themselves the terms which define what it is to exist at all.⁴ This, indeed, is the (physicalist) principle Kant invokes in the “Second Analogy” (in *CPR*, “Principles of Pure Understanding”) to explain what is definitive of our experience of something as “real”. We experience something *as* real precisely to the

extent that we experience it as participating in the world of nature, that is, in the domain that operates according to its own constitutive principles and not according to the terms of our subjective experience. This, Kant writes, is precisely what we mean by “cause”: to experience something as real is to experience it as being the way it is because of how it fits into the causal nexus that immanently defines the independently existing world of nature (a causal nexus that we study in natural science and attempt to express in our articulation of natural laws).⁵ The more developed form of physicalism, then, is not simply an appeal to everything being made of “the same stuff”, but is rather an appeal to *the terms of the physical universe* as the ultimate terms of explanation and this is a notion that already involves an implicit notion of self-organization.

A great deal of metaphysical ground is covered between the idea of a uniform matter of which everything is “made” and to which everything can be reduced, and the idea of nature as self-occurrent, self-organizing system. No doubt part of the initial appeal of the most simplistic materialism is its appearance of logical simplicity – “it’s all one (kind of) thing” offers a seemingly unambiguous conceptual resting point from which to embark on further investigations – but we can already see that the more sophisticated forms of physicalism demand our involvement with a much more sophisticated and complex “logic”, a more articulate metaphysics.

Hegel’s *Science of Logic*: non-reductive physicalism and emergence

Hegel’s *Science of Logic* is a rigorous and profound investigation into what it is “to be”. In this respect, the *Science of Logic* parallels Kant’s study of the “Principles of Pure Understanding”, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which (as we noted above) Kant analyses what is involved in our experiencing something *as* real, for this work studies, roughly, the kinds of relations that are immanent to anything that *is*, insofar as it is. This study of the immanent “logic” of the real amounts to a kind of compendium of the relationships that characterize existence, eventually distinguishes different forms of existence (such as existing as a property, as a thing, as a force, etc.), and ultimately demonstrates, roughly, what is possible and what is not within the terms of the real. The “logical” or metaphysical distance covered between “pure matter” and “self-organizing nature” that we are here considering is roughly the distance covered in the first two of the three books of the *Science of Logic*, the “Doctrine of Being” and the “Doctrine of Essence”.⁶ One of

the most valuable contributions Hegel can make to the contemporary philosophy of mind is his subtle and rigorous analysis of the logic of a non-reductive physicalism.

The first important contribution from the *Science of Logic* is the analysis of “finitude” that Hegel offers as the core notion of the “Doctrine of Being”.⁷ Anything, in order to be said to “be”, must meet three characteristics: (a) it must itself be something specific: it must be *determinate*; (b) it must (thus) be one among many, that is, it must stand in relationship with other determinacies; and (c) all of these together must be the exclusive, but non-exhaustive enactment of being. Considering the meaning of each of these claims in turn will allow us to see that it is never simply true to say that “something is what it is”.

- (a) In order for a being to be, it must be different from the others. This is what we mean by calling something a “something” – insofar as it is an “it”, it is not to be confused with another: it is one determinate something and this means it is *not* another. It is when we consider this point alone that we are inclined to say that “something is what it is”; this thesis, however, fails to take into account the necessary context in which any such finite something occurs.
- (b) If, in order for *it* to *be*, the finite something *must be in relation to* determinate others, then *it cannot be ontologically separated from* those others, in that they are the condition under which it is. It cannot be itself by itself: its being is only realized through those others. But, point (a) – its determinacy – is precisely its necessary separation from them. To be, then, the finite thing *must both be and not be those others*. This is not a contradiction, but rather a description of the complex ontological situation of dependence and independence that characterizes finite being. Each finite being is a facet of or an “effect” of a single fabric, but a fabric characterized by the opposition of itself from itself. This is the first reason why, though it is a necessary truth, it is not a sufficient truth, that a thing “is what it is”. Further, we can see that “not being” the others is not simply an “external” description that is a way of describing what is really just a positive quality of the finite being alone; rather, the determinacy of the finite being is *an ontological act of resistance* – it must actively “not-be” the others. The field of finite beings is thus a field of beings that effectively repel themselves from each other (at the same time as they attract each other, in that they constitute a single field).
- (c) Now, there is nothing “more” than all the finite beings, in the sense of another “something” above and beyond the totality of finite

beings (for, if there were, it would be another finite being and hence already included in the field it putatively exceeded); at the same time, however, this *exclusive* ontological claim to being “what is” does not *exhaust* “what is”. We can recognize this easily enough if we remember that, tomorrow, “what is” will be determinately different from “what is” today. The “new” finite somethings that characterize tomorrow will “be” just as much as today’s “are”, and so, similarly, will any other beings that might eventuate. Being, in other words, does not simply name the actual totality of beings, but names beyond that the open, infinite horizon of possibility: being is *whatever might be* and not just what actually is. The finite totality that actually is, then, does not exhaust being, but, on the contrary, is a realization of it that in principle never lives up to the full meaning of “being”, even as it precisely and exclusively defines what, concretely, “being” amounts to. Finite being, then, is necessarily *not* “being as such” and this “not”, like the “not” we discovered above, is not simply a colourful *façon de parler*, but, as are the negations among finite beings, it is a definitive ontological relation of distancing, constitutive of what it means for something to “be”: finite beings “are” precisely in and as their not being “being as such”. Again, then, it is not sufficient to say that the finite being simply “is what it is”: rather, if we may put it so, it is only as not-being being (as such).

So the finite thing, rather than being an ontologically isolated atom, is in fact more like a point of concentration in a field of opposed forces and this in both a “horizontal” and a “vertical” sense, so to speak. In fact, this idea, though articulated in complex and provocative language, is, again, quite a familiar one experientially and this at every level from the most particular to the most universal matters of being. Whenever we recognize a “thing” – when, for example, I recognize “that dog” – I already treat all the finite determinacies of its existence – its individual hairs, the fleshy pads on its paws, its tongue and its teeth – as (i) essentially differentiated from each other while being united *as* a single body and (ii) the current but temporary form of *that dog’s* reality.⁸ In other words, I recognize (1) the differential determinacy of each finite moment of the thing (not confusing it, the left elbow, for example, with any of the others, such as the pastern, the toe, etc.), while recognizing (2) that these moments are differentiated from each other only as the realization of a fundamental “holding together” of them all as a single fabric (“the” body) and (3) that this total fabric is the exclusive but non-exhaustive realization of the fundamental reality (the dog

itself) that gives that totality its identity. We normally capture this whole logic of the relation of “finite and infinite” by using precisely this language of “identity” or, alternatively, we refer to “what” something is, or its “essence”. The logic of finitude – its very meaning – thus inherently leads us to the logic of “Essence”, the subject of the second major study of the *Science of Logic*.

In the language of the “Doctrine of Essence”, this relation between the thing and its properties is one of “reflection” (see *SL* 394–408). The thing, Hegel would say, is a reality “reflected into itself”, meaning that the very character of the existence of the properties is the way in which a deeper reality is enacted in and through them: the thing does not exist in any way other than as its realization in its properties, but its reality is not exhausted therein. The properties are the immediate realization or the “show” (“*Schein*”) of that “reflectedness into self” or “essence” (“*Wesen*”). Such an understanding of the nature of reality is implied whenever we recognize something as a “thing” and also when we recognize, for example, nature as a whole, as a single physical system in which all the determinate physical events are law-governed effects (the “*Schein*”) of the causal forces that emanate from the intrinsic nature (the “*Wesen*”) of matter or energy – of nature as such.⁹

What these studies from the *Science of Logic* demonstrate is that physical reality – nature – cannot be understood on a logic of “*partes extra partes*”, of isolated metaphysical atoms, but must be understood, at the level of both the individual thing (as Aristotle showed) and nature as a whole (as Spinoza showed), as a reality “reflected in itself”. In this sense, Hegel argues for an essentially “layered” view of nature in which nature as a whole must be recognized as real, but as metaphysically distinct from individual things, which are also real and metaphysically distinct from their properties, which are also real: as we shift our focus from property to thing to the “substance” of nature as a whole, we do not notice new “pieces”, but recognize, rather, irreducibly different levels of organization. These layers, too, are not ontologically indifferent; instead, when we recognize the “thing” in contrast to the properties, or “nature as such” in contrast to things, we are precisely recognizing what we take to be what is ontologically and causally more primary.¹⁰

There is thus an ontological layering within nature. Hegel goes further, though, to argue that nature itself is, so to speak, simply another “layer” of reality. The “Doctrine of the Concept”, the third and final study in the *Science of Logic*, reveals the logic and structure of *emergent* realities that only arise on the basis of nature but are not reducible to nature: specifically, the logic of the concept is the logic of *self-conscious*

existence, broadly construed.¹¹ In this sense, the relationship between this third study (which Hegel calls the “Subjective Logic”) and the earlier two studies (which Hegel collectively calls the “Objective Logic”), rather precisely defines the central question of contemporary philosophy of mind: how should the realities of consciousness be understood in relationship to non-reductive physicalism? A brief consideration of Hegel’s “Doctrine of the Concept” will provide us a helpful jumping off point for turning to the distinct contribution that his study of experience in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* can make to contemporary philosophy of mind through its study of the constitutive dimensions of (self-)conscious experience that are dependent upon, but irreducible to, physicality.

When Aristotle sought to determine what we mean by “soul”, he specified that it was the essence or the “first actuality” of a *body capable of life* and this characterization of the body is important. The living body – the organism – is a body that could die and this is not an accidental feature of it: the unity that defines the living body is a unity enacted in and through a *determinate* body, that is, a body that will not simply disappear if the unity is lost but will assume a different, competing organization. Life, like “thinghood”, is a reality not reducible to the terms of the “materiality” in which it is realized *and which it defines*, but the materiality in which life is realized is itself logically more complex than the property in which thinghood is realized: life is a kind of reality enacted only in the context of a kind of competition, an “*Auseinandersetzung*”, so to speak, with other aspects of nature.¹² For this reason, “life” is a deeper concept than “thing”: the living organism must exist in a dynamic interaction with an alien environment that, left to itself, would destroy the organism but which is itself the medium upon which the organism depends to maintain itself: the organism’s identity is only *won through encounter*.¹³ By the logic of “the concept”, Hegel refers to that kind of reality, like life, that exists only through a constitutive relationship to what opposes it. This constitutive opposition is also what characterizes, paradigmatically, our consciousness.

Consciousness is the encounter with an object, the awareness of that which one definitively is not, hence the whole notion of “causality” that we have studied above.¹⁴ Though the *content* of experience is exhaustively engaged by this other that it contacts, experience is nonetheless not simply an utter giving of itself over to this other – else it would not *be* experience. On the contrary, as Kant argued, just to be conscious, we must be implicitly self-conscious: our experience is not a loss of ourselves in the object, but is always a maintaining of oneself as a point of reference in and through an absorption in the other.¹⁵ And

yet, this “self” of self-consciousness is no extra “part” of consciousness, just as the soul in Aristotle’s understanding is no extra “part” of the body. The self is enacted only in and as the defining form of the appearing of the object as such. Self-consciousness – subjectivity – is, like life, a reality that exists only in and as a definitive relationship of opposition, a reality that exists only in and through the objectivity it definitively is not. It is Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and especially Chapter IV, “Self-Consciousness”, that offers the richest exploration of this definitive reality that is self-consciousness.

Phenomenology of Spirit: bodily self-consciousness and other minds

Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as its title indicates, is a *phenomenological* study of our experience. This means that it is a study that describes experience “from the inside”, rather than interpreting our experience according to some presupposed model of reality. With our discussions above of Kant’s “Second Analogy” and Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, we have already been engaged in a kind of phenomenology, inasmuch as we asked “What is it to experience something *as real*?”; another way to say this is that our study above already acknowledged that the very notion of “reality” is a notion *for* a (particular kind of) perspective. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel studies many other perspectives that define our living experience. His descriptions of the forms of experience reveal other aspects of experience that contextualize and, to some extent, challenge the terms of the “objective” perspective that we have been presuming so far. His study of self-consciousness in particular identifies three essential dimensions of self-consciousness that are of crucial importance for the philosophy of mind: desire, recognition and thought. Each of these dimensions reveals characteristics, intrinsic to the fact of experiencing, that are irreducible to the physicality that is nonetheless the condition of their existence.

Self-consciousness is not initially a matter of explicit self-reflection, but is a matter of the implicit relation-to-self that gives the form to our meaningful experience; this (self-)consciousness is most immediately enacted as the experience of desire.¹⁶ We typically imagine desire to be the desires *of* a person, an already formed and socially integrated ego. Hegel, though (like Freud, Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari in the twentieth century), investigates the primitive experience of desire that *precedes* ego formation.¹⁷ This desire (*Begierde*) does not first reflect upon itself to articulate a goal and then instrumentally call upon the mechanism of the body to enact it; on the contrary, this is a consciousness that

exists only in and as the practice of carrying itself out, the “self” that finds itself only as the experience of satisfaction in the “consummation” of its encounter with its other.¹⁸ This primitive desire is not a *thought*, but a *behaviour*.¹⁹ In its most basic enactment, (self-)consciousness, then, is a matter of practice and, hence, inherently bodily. Most immediately, (self-)consciousness just is the body *lived as* the enactment of desire.

From this discussion of desire, we can see that this most basic sense of “self” is not separable from one’s experience of one’s own body in relation to the world: a bodily self-consciousness. This is the primitive experience of self, *but also the primitive enactment of the body*: the body of the (self-)conscious individual is not the body of inert matter (*Körper*) but is *one’s own body (Leib, le corps propre)*, the body lived as the experience of enacting one’s powers and possibilities for engagement.²⁰ Agency is not something super-added to an inert, existing body (*Körper*), but is inseparable from the existence of the body: it is only *as an agent* that the body (*Leib*) exists, and the primitive enactment of self and equally the primitive reality of the body is thus the implicit experience of, as Husserl describes it, the “I can”.²¹ The primitive experience of self-consciousness is the experience of one’s bodily powers, which, *qua* possibilities, are not reducible to what is actual.

In desire, one experiences the excess of possibility over actuality: one experiences one’s capacity, precisely, to re-form the terms of the actual. The analyses so far have stressed the irreducible “negativity” that is constitutive of the different “layers” of reality, and the implicit self-consciousness of desire is the implicit recognition of this its own irreducibility: desire is the lived experience of itself as precisely *not* its object and, more, *not* its body inasmuch as desire determines, rather than is determined by, the form of the actual. But again, not-being one’s body is not simply being “not” it in the sense of being another – on the contrary, desire precisely reveals the impossibility of consciousness existing independently of a body: desire is the implicit awareness of itself as *not* being *defined* by the very bodily reality in and as which it is enacted.²²

Our very self-consciousness is thus the recognition of *a negativity*: it is the recognition of a reality – a formative, causal reality – that in principle cannot be reduced to a present actuality. This, too, is the essential character of our experience of other self-conscious beings. Recognizing another self-consciousness *as* a self-consciousness is precisely a matter of recognizing a negativity: it is the recognition, precisely, of an *absence*, not in the sense of something “not there”, but in the sense of something that is there *as* something that can never be present, something that is recognized *through* physical actuality but is irreducible *to* it.

Because we do recognize other self-consciousnesses, we implicitly already recognize that the meaning of our own existence is not exclusively determined by ourselves, for we are objects for another desire which has an authority equal to our own to determine the sense of the bodily actuality that is the context for the existence of all of us.²³ For this reason, our sense of ourselves – the terms in which we become articulate in recognizing ourselves – must ultimately be negotiated in what Hegel calls the dialectic of “recognition” (“*Anerkennung*”): our self-consciousness is ultimately accomplished in a kind of dialogue through which we jointly adopt a shared frame of reference for interpreting ourselves and our world.²⁴

My personal identity – my “I” – is thus always formed in tandem with a communal identity – our “we”. This “‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’” – the reality Hegel calls “*Geist*” (“spirit”) – is thus a reality inherently dependent upon the language and the social institutions in and through which a communally shared experience of the world is constituted. So, whereas the singularity of our desiring (self-)consciousness is necessarily embodied in our organism, our explicit sense of ourselves as individuals is *not* uniquely embodied in our organism, but is embodied in our language and institutions that, as inherently intersubjective, exceed the parameters of any single body.²⁵ It is for this reason that, *as* reflective selves, we have a sense of ourselves as independent of the terms of organic embodiment: through language, we participate in a perspective that offers a world of meaning that outstrips our natural existence, such that the life-projects that define “me” (such as my identity as a skiing instructor) can be in principle at odds with the realities that define my organism (such as my paralysis after a skiing accident).²⁶

Language, furthermore, *qua* inherently shared, can never be the expression of a closed, singular perspective, either of an individual or of a culture; rather, by using language I/we (performatively) make my/our perspective one that is in principle sharable by all others.²⁷ In adopting language, then, I assume an identity that is not limited to the limited perspective afforded by my unique organic and linguistic embodiment, but that participates in principle in the universal and necessary perspective of objectivity. Beyond the particularity of our shared, cultural perspective, there is furthermore a universality integral to the experience of the “I”; Hegel calls this dimension of self-consciousness “thought” (“*Denken*”).

In desire, we found the irreducibility of the lived sense of agency that demands that we recognize the irreducibility of the first-person perspective in experience. In recognition, we found the reflective sense of

self whereby we establish a meaningful reality for ourselves that exceeds the perspective afforded by our organic embodiment, but is itself embodied in language. With thought, we find the experience of rational autonomy (famously described epistemologically and morally by Descartes and Kant, respectively) in which we precisely experience ourselves as engaging with a meaningfulness that is unconditioned, which is to say definitively *not* defined by a bodily or linguistic perspective.

Just as our personal identity can be self-defined, independently of the terms of our bodies, so can thought be self-defined, independently of the terms of persons. It is only *by being* a body, though, that one can participate in personal identity, and it is only *by being* a person that one can participate in thought. That thought by its nature must be autonomous, or else it is not thought, is a point that was powerfully made by Aristotle in book III, chapter 4 of *De Anima* (*On the Soul*); Aristotle, however, also made the corresponding point that *we are not* thought. Rather, he notes, “all thought takes place in a phantasm”, that is, we can have our experience informed and illuminated by thought, but only by occupying a particular perspective that is itself ineffaceably bodily. Hegel similarly shows that, while each of us necessarily exists only as a finite, embodied perspective, it is nonetheless true that that perspective opens us to an irreducible meaningfulness that exceeds the terms of that finitude.²⁸

Conclusion

Drawing out the implications, then, of the “Doctrine of the Concept” from the *Science of Logic*, the phenomenological description of the experience of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* demonstrates that non-reductive physicalism is correct in that, were the world of physical nature to be obliterated, there would be no reality left over. That said, however, physical reality does not exhaust the real, and the life of self-consciousness is a metaphysically novel realm that exceeds the terms of nature. Hegel’s philosophy of mind is anti-dualistic – indeed, his whole philosophy is premised on the untenability in principle of any dualism – and he understands consciousness to be essentially embodied. At the same time, however, that embodiment does not define what it is to be self-conscious and, further, the emergent forms of meaning within self-conscious life reveal that we are embodied *beyond* our individuality, which is to say our identities as persons are not simply identical with our identities as bodies:²⁹ we are embodied in language and social institutions, which means there can be a meaningful distinction between me and my body, and we are informed by

autonomous rationality (which we might call “mind” proper), which means there can be a meaningful distinction between terms that define our finite perspectives and those finite perspectives themselves.

Notes

- 1 On these themes, see especially *EnMind* §389. The content of this paragraph is also richly developed in Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit*. Discussing Plato’s *Phaedo* and Kant, Hegel writes, “The soul is for itself, simple, while matter is the opposite, [namely,] manifold. The soul has relation to matter and relation presupposes something in common, a community or unity. But how can the simple be in unity with that which is complex and manifold?” (Hegel 2007: 64). Then he goes on: “Spirit and matter are different, a dualism, a difference that counts as something absolutely independent, but the unity of spirit is opposed to such dualism. The contradiction of reason’s demand for unity can be dissolved in two ways: 1. When it is said that matter is essential, while spirit is merely an appearance, form, or modification [of matter]. This is the standpoint of materialism which answers the speculative need to suspend the dualism of the understanding ... This unity is so conceived that matter is the true while spirit is its product. If matter thus unites things, then spirit would come forth as fleeting and transitory ... 2. Spirit is self-sufficient, genuine, while nature is only the appearance of spirit and not something in and for itself, not something truly real. Materialism is much preferable to this spiritualistic idealism, since its view is that matter is independent and spirit is dependent. Idealism has much against it, because one needs only to touch matter in order to experience resistance. It is folly to deny the reality of matter” (*ibid.*: 69). But this materialist standpoint “is not the absolute standpoint” (*ibid.*: 70).
- 2 Stoljar (2009) is an excellent overview of contemporary physicalism.
- 3 See Hegel (2007: 70): “[M]atter is taken to be lawful and nature as a system where everything takes place according to laws. In reference to spirit many experiences can be adduced to show that spirit is dependent, the result of nature, illness etc”.
- 4 Compare Spinoza’s *Ethics* (1985), Part I, Proposition 29, Scholium, on the notion of *natura naturans*.
- 5 See Kant (*CPR* 304–16 = A189–211/B232–56). More exactly, Kant argues that we experience the flow of our experience as being dictated by the causal order governing the object of our experience, rather than experience the flow of our experience as being directed by our personal subjectivity. An experience that has the latter form we call, on the contrary, a “fantasy” (A193/B238). On this theme, compare Freud’s notion of the “reality principle” (Freud 1961: ch. 2).
- 6 These two portions of the *Logic* cover the basic ground covered in Kant’s “categories” of pure understanding, the “Doctrine of Being” corresponding to what Kant calls the “mathematical” categories and the “Doctrine of Essence” corresponding to what Kant calls the “dynamical” categories. I have discussed this parallel elsewhere (Russon 2011). For the interpretation of the “Doctrine of Being”, see especially Houlgate (2005b); for the interpretation of the “Doctrine of Essence”, see Henrich (1978).

- 7 These themes are developed in subtle detail throughout all of Section One of the “Doctrine of Being”, “Determinateness”, but the study comes to a head in the discussion of finitude; see *SL* 116–50. For a careful and compelling interpretation of this material, see Houlgate (2005b: ch. 20–22); see also Burbidge (2006: ch. 6).
- 8 This is what Aristotle meant by calling the *psuchê* (soul) the “primary reality” or “first actuality” of a naturally organized body (*De Anima*, II.1, 412a22–28). In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel says, “Empirical psychology represents the soul as disintegrated and what Aristotle has written about the soul is still to be recommended as the most philosophical” (2007: 65).
- 9 The study of the thing and of nature as such a “substance” are in fact the two major studies of the “Doctrine of Essence”; see especially *SL* 484–98, 554–71, 578–80.
- 10 On this theme of “layering”, see especially Haugland (1982) and Meehl and Sellars (1956).
- 11 Self-consciousness broadly and ontologically construed: the experiential phenomenon of self-consciousness that is most familiar to us in our saying “I” is only one (very crucial) form of self-conscious existence, as we shall see in what follows. Hegel identifies the Concept with the “I” throughout the section called “The Concept in General”, especially in *SL* 583–86.
- 12 On the emergent, irreducible character of life, compare J. S. Mill (1872: bk III, ch. 6, §1): “All organised bodies are composed of parts, similar to those composing inorganic nature and which have even themselves existed in an inorganic state; but the phenomena of life, which result from the juxtaposition of those parts in a certain manner, bear no analogy to any of the effects which would be produced by the action of the component substances considered as mere physical agents. To whatever degree we might imagine our knowledge of the properties of the several ingredients of a living body to be extended and perfected, it is certain that no mere summing up of the separate actions of those elements will ever amount to the action of the living body itself”. On the idea that the organism is in a relationship of contestation with the environment upon which it depends, see R. C. Lewontin (1993: ch. 5).
- 13 See *PS* §171. For Hegel’s analysis of life, see *SL* 761–74 and *PS* §168.
- 14 This is the subject of the first section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “Consciousness”, the three chapters of which recapitulate condensed versions of the arguments from the *Science of Logic*, but there in the form of answering the question, “What is the nature of the object of consciousness?” rather than, “What is it to be?”
- 15 This is the “transcendental unity of apperception”; see Kant (*CPR* 232–33 = A106–8).
- 16 See *PS* §167.
- 17 See *PS* §§173–74. For discussion of Hegel’s understanding of desire, see especially David Ciavatta (2008). For more on the relation of Hegel’s ideas to those of Freud, see Mills (2002).
- 18 See *PS* §174: “[S]elf-consciousness is thus certain of itself only by superseding this other that presents itself to self-consciousness as an independent life; self-consciousness is desire”. See also *PS* §167: “self-consciousness is

the reflection out of the being of the world of sense and perception, and is essentially the return from *otherness*".

- 19 Compare Ryle's analysis of the distinction between knowing-how and knowing-that in Ryle (1949: ch. 2).
- 20 Compare Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit* (2007: 75–76): "mere parts become members in living ... as sentient soul, the I is omnipresent in the body and it exists only as a unity. < I am constantly conscious of this unity. When feeling the tip of my finger, I [also] feel [myself] there. There the feeling soul exists, the capacity of feeling, sensation ... [from *W*] > This omnipresence shows that the material mutual externality of nature has no truth". On Hegel's use of the terms *Körper* and *Leib*, see especially *EnMind* §401 (along with *Zusatz* to §401) and §§403–09 in general; these terms and themes also come up repeatedly in the section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* entitled "Observing Reason". Elsewhere I have discussed various aspects of Hegel's approach to the themes of embodiment in relationship to Hegel's study of "Reason" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*; see Russon (1993).
- 21 See especially Husserl (1989: 159, 228, 273). For the importance of the notion of "I can" for contemporary philosophy of mind, see Thompson (2007: 249, 313–14).
- 22 Self-consciousness thus exists only in the context of life and is always the self-consciousness *of* (possessive genitive) a living being, but it is not reducible to that life. This is especially the theme of Hegel's analysis of the "Struggle to the Death"; see especially *PS* §189: "In this experience, self-consciousness learns that life is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness". See also Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit* (2007: 77): "The question concerning the immateriality of the soul has been of great interest. It follows from what has been said that the soul is not a material mutual externality, nor is it something immaterial in contrast to the material. The soul is immaterial only in the sense that that immaterial is the true and the material is the untrue. The immateriality of the soul is therefore < not > asserted in opposition to matter, but only in the sense that the soul alone is truly real and independent. The self-externality of nature has volatilized into universality".
- 23 Hegel's famous study in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* of the "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness" is an investigation of the logical inconsistencies and practical problems of the various behaviours we can engage in that do not explicitly make this recognition.
- 24 Compare Sellars (1963: 127–96, especially 164–96).
- 25 This, in a nutshell, is the central thesis of my book *The Self and Its Body in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Russon 1997).
- 26 See my discussion of the "simultaneous but not synchronous" temporalities of nature and spirit in "Temporality and the Future of Philosophy in Hegel's *Phenomenology*" (Russon 2008: 66–67).
- 27 See especially Jacques Derrida's "Signature, Event, Context" (1982a: 315–16). On this point, compare Ludwig Wittgenstein's remarks against the possibility of a private language (1953: §§243, 256).
- 28 See Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit* (2007: 58): "Finite spirit stands between two realms: one, the natural, is the corporal; the other, distinct from and opposed to nature, is the infinite, the absolute". Compare

also *ibid.*: 66: “The human being is spirit. What is the innermost, concentrated nature, the root of spirit? Freedom, I, thinking”; and then further, “Freedom consists in the fact that the human being can abstract from everything, even from life and from the encompassing world of consciousness ... The human being can bear infinite anguish. This is the special prerogative of freedom, conceived as concrete freedom.”

- 29 See again Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit* (2007: 78): “The question concerning the community of the soul with the body creates no difficulties here, because matter is nothing independent ... In fact, this is not a community, but the soul is in and for itself contrasted with the corporeal, so that it has no difficulty in the body. Only if both are taken as independent is the question a difficult one. It becomes difficult if this dualism is tacitly assumed < for then no community can occur [*W*] >.”

4 Ethical theory

Brian O'Connor

The word “ethics” is commonly taken to be a synonym for morality. In more formal contexts it serves as the name for codified conduct that governs individuals by virtue of their voluntary membership in particular institutions or professions. Although both of these significances are encompassed within Hegel’s conception of ethics, he intends a yet broader meaning for it. The German word Hegel uses is *Sittlichkeit*, a word that is sometimes translated into English as morality as well as ethics. The stem of *Sittlichkeit* is *Sitte*, meaning customs and suggesting practices that partly form ongoing ways of life.¹ In Hegel’s philosophy the sphere of ethics concerns both the actions of the individual moral agent and the normative environment that gives those actions their moral value. Considerations of ethics in its moral philosophical and its political institutional contexts cannot therefore be adequately treated in isolation from each other. It is of crucial importance in understanding Hegel’s ethics that his claim about the inextricability of moral agents from their ethical environment runs much deeper than the notion that the community simply furnishes agents with sets of approved or disapproved options. It says that we are constitutively communal beings whose judgements about the preferability of one choice over another are already influenced by our communal situation.

Although Hegel acknowledges the diverse configurations of ethical communities historically, it is not the case that he takes a relativist view of ethics. He explicitly identifies what he perceives as deficiencies in past forms of the ethical life (Patten 1999: 59). And equally, he urges his readers not to lose sight of the unique potential of the ethical life of modern society. What is finally available to modern ethical beings is “reason”, a capacity for the governance of freedom and morality that is without precedent in earlier forms of social life. The ethical life of modern societies can be *rational*, unlike the apparently organic communities of the ancient Greeks (whose ethical life was vulnerable to

Socrates' requests for justification). For Hegel "rationality" entails autonomy. Autonomy is present when agents endorse only those motivations for practical action which they can justify to other beings like themselves. It is Hegel's view that the autonomy of the individual requires rational institutions that will structure that individual's community. In this respect, as we shall see, his notion of autonomy is a critical departure from that of Kant in that Kantian autonomy appears to be grounded in a universal rationality that requires no reference to any existing social arrangements.

In developing his account of what it means to be an ethical agent within an ethical community, Hegel introduced to moral philosophy a number of significant innovations. Central among them is the notion of the intersubjective basis of the moral life, an innovation that culminated in his theory of "recognition". That theory accommodates many of the elements that had preoccupied Hegel from the beginning of his time as an independent philosopher: namely, his initial efforts to rescue the moral teachings of Jesus from the rigid institutions of religion; the reflections on love that mark his early work; an account of ethical experience that would contrast with Kant's transcendental moral philosophy. This chapter will offer an historical examination of the emergence of Hegel's conception of ethics by tracing the various forms that that conception would take throughout his career.

"The Tübingen Essay"

"The Tübingen Essay" (1793) is Hegel's earliest worked-through piece on the nature of ethical motivation. Among the essay's concerns is the identification of the form of religion that would enable the most authentic variety of moral life. At this stage Hegel is still some distance from a theory of the intersubjective basis of ethics. Yet for all that, "The Tübingen Essay" contains a number of commitments which would persist throughout the ongoing elaboration of his conception of ethics, as well as others which were to be discarded.

In "The Tübingen Essay" Hegel holds the romantic view that our motivation for practical action in accordance with "sacred teaching" can be found in "the uncorrupted human sensibility" (TE 30). As it stands, this position suggests that moral agency comes premade into the world and the world, if anything, carries with it the threat of corrupting that agency. But Hegel also adds that instruction in morality somehow complements the "seed of finer sentiments" that lies within us. Without that natural propensity there could be no receptivity to the content of religious morality. Hegel defines the purpose of morality in

quite non-religious terms. It involves “satisfaction of the instinct for happiness” (TE 31). Yet he also conceives this as a rational enterprise, though not one which can be pursued if we ignore both “external and internal nature” and “sensuality”, which he glosses as “both the surroundings” in which the moral agent lives and “his sensual inclinations and blind instinct” (TE 31). Nevertheless, Hegel insists that sensuality is to be animated by reason. Beside that claim, though, is the remark that “religion engages the heart” (TE 32). The content of religious morality can engage us because religious feelings are themselves sensuous: they are not the directives of “cool reason”, which is without the capacity to determine the heart. Hegel may appear to offer us a conundrum here: he has claimed both that reason animates sensuality and that sensuality can be appropriately determined only by sensuous motives. What then is the character of reason?

Hegel’s contention is that religious morality degenerates into principles and dogmas as it seeks to become “objective”, whereas subjective religion allows morality to be expressed in feelings and actions. He suggests that objective religion is attractive to those who give priority to the understanding and “whose hearts simply do not resonate to the gentle stroke of love” (TE 34). The understanding might make us “smarter but not better” (TE 40). Nevertheless, Hegel does not jettison reason altogether. The significance of his claim that reason animates sensuous beings is clarified when he speaks about wisdom, which turns out to be the conception of reason that can work harmoniously with our sensuous being: “Wisdom is something quite different from enlightenment, from ratiocination. But wisdom is not science. Wisdom is *the soul’s elevation, through experience deepened by reflection*, over its dependence on opinion and the impressions of sense” (TE 43, emphasis added).

Hegel observes that objective religion has little interest in wisdom of this kind as it encourages instead an inflexible approach to “the letter and the convention” of religion. This is in some ways worse than a religion of the understanding alone as it excludes any rational basis for adherence: it is a pure following, devoid of justification. What Hegel proposes as an alternative might be seen as an early effort to set out a radically new socio-ethical form of life that is sympathetic to the actual practical needs and tendencies of moral beings. His proposal is “folk religion”. The characteristics of such a religion are (i) “universal reason” (i.e. that its ethical principles apply to every human being), (ii) its resonance with the senses and (iii) integrity – that it informs all of our actions, not simply those required in our public and outwardly observable duties (TE 49). Individuals whose ethical life is lived within

this folk religion will not be constrained by rigid principles, nor will they experience alienation from sensuousness. In this way folk religion “goes hand in hand with freedom” (TE 56).

“The Tübingen Essay” sets out in rudimentary form the elements of the ethical life of the moral being that Hegel would further develop: a sympathetic alignment of reason with sensuousness that ensures a flexible – not principle-laden – approach to action; a form of religion that reconciles the subjective with the objective. And characterizing understanding in a particular way, it also identifies non-rational sources of moral motivation that can be experienced as the agent’s own.

In sketches that followed this early essay, Hegel continued to reflect on the characteristics of the ethical life, conceiving it in contrast with the narrow institutional forms of objective Christianity.² While Hegel does not reject the Christian view of Jesus’ divinity, he represents him primarily as an exemplary and inspirational moral individual. In certain respects, Hegel contends in a fragmentary work that survives from his time in Berne (1793 to 1796/97), Socrates might be likened to Jesus as a teacher and ethical agent. The essay “The Life of Jesus” from 1795 again highlights Jesus’ outstanding ethical character. Hegel cautiously deflates some of the biblical reports of Jesus’ supernatural powers.

“The Positivity of the Christian Religion”

In “The Positivity of the Christian Religion” (1795/96) Hegel produces a substantial account of the ethical life which is to consist in a de-institutionalized Christian morality. His target is positive Christianity, that is, Christianity that had surrendered the dynamic ethical attitude of Jesus and given itself over to inflexible laws. In fact, positive Christianity, in Hegel’s account, is a relapse to the very form of religiosity that Jesus had endeavoured to correct in his confrontation with the legalisms of ancient Judaism. Those legalisms stifled the moral life. As Hegel puts it: Jesus “undertook to raise religion and virtue to morality and to restore to morality the freedom which is its essence” (PCR 69). The freedom at issue is that which human beings naturally possess but which is destroyed when we take our ethical life as the business of living in accordance with authoritative precepts (PCR 71). Jesus, Hegel claims, “was the teacher of a purely moral religion, not a positive one” (PCR 71).

Hegel is fully aware that this conception of Jesus as a teacher rather than as an authority is quite at odds with the orthodox view. And because Hegel insists on this picture, Jesus becomes for Hegel a kind of *phronimos* – that is, like Aristotle’s image of a virtuous moral agent – albeit an unnaturally gifted one whose articulations of the moral life

are not intended as declarations of law. The contrast between the religious life based on authority and the ethical life of a non-positive Christianity rests on two differing forms of reason. Hegel labels these forms "passive" and "legislative" respectively. Those who turn Christian ethics into a positive system reduce reason to "a purely receptive faculty, instead of a legislative one" (PCR 85).

Hegel sees a further substantial gain to be made by extricating morality from receptive reason. He argues that the reduction of the content of the ethical life to positivity (i.e. existing authorities) *ipso facto* reduces morality to adherence. It may be tempting, he speculates, for the state to use religion as its method of moral instruction (i.e. to make its citizens virtuous) but this would serve only to undercut the very essence of morality. It reduces the understanding and practice of morality to what the laws of the state happen to be. In this way it gives the false signal that obeying the law is all that morality requires: it "seduces men into believing that morality has been satisfied by the observance of these state-regulated religious practices" (PCR 98). Indeed, the idea that we can subsume our behaviour under laws and thereby become ethical beings, Hegel claims, produces a kind of moral inertness in which individuals may deceive themselves about their true, inner character, or experience a false tranquillity in which they can satisfy themselves that they have performed with sufficient morality (PCR 140).

For Hegel, the contrast between that narrow conception and Jesus' dynamic teachings is emphatic. An individual guided by those teachings is freely committed to them: "he adopts no duties except the one imposed by himself" (PCR 100). Individuals self-legislating in this way become members of a moral community, of what Hegel calls "the invisible church" (PCR 100), in contrast to those who submit themselves to the laws of a religious sect which prescribes their moral identities. Religious morality in the positive sense, Hegel writes, "is not a datum of our own minds, a proposition which could be developed out of our own consciousness, but rather something learned. On this view morality is not a self-subsistent science or one with independent principles; neither is the essence of morality grounded on freedom, i.e. it is not the autonomy of the will" (PCR 135). Of course, there is also a learning process as one grows towards the non-positive form of Christianity Hegel is proposing: we must learn about the teachings of Jesus and the specific ways in which he made moral decisions. But Hegel's point is that that learning is only the beginning of the ethical life: it forms our character and must not petrify into a set of rules. As we have seen Hegel describe it, genuinely free morality is "developed out of our own consciousness" and we are never subservient to it.

When Hegel speaks about autonomy he borrows from Kant's negative dimension of the term, namely, the absence of motivations that are external to me. He writes:

The sole moral motive, respect for the moral law, can be aroused only in a subject to whom the law is itself the legislator, from whose own inner consciousness this law proceeds. But the Christian religion [i.e. the positive variety] proclaims that the moral law is something outside us and something given.

(PCR 144)

Respect for the moral law in this autonomous form is demanded by our humanity. Self-legislation is something we cannot "renounce" without ceasing to be human beings (PCR 145). There are, though, unstated qualifications in Hegel's use of the Kantian notion of autonomy. To speak of the moral law is to suggest precepts, whereas Hegel actually intends nothing more than the form of life that is manifest in the practice and example of Jesus. Furthermore, in Kant's hands self-legislation means governing oneself through reason and not permitting any non-universalizable motivation – such as desire or happiness – to shape the principles we give ourselves. Hegel, as we have seen, believes we must accommodate our sensuous side within any account of morality.

"The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate"

In "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate" (1788–1800), Hegel initiates the process of making explicit the various ways in which he will depart from Kant. It is here that he begins to name as morality the deficient form of ethical life that is merely "reverence for the laws" (SCF 212). Again, Jesus is his exemplar and he represents him as "a spirit raised above morality" (*ibid.*). What "morality" lacks is a place in the living character of the agent. Ethical practice consists in making the law one's own. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount teaches this, Hegel believes, in that fulfilling the moral law in a non-deficient sense is not the experience of constraint but of transcending that law by making it an act of one's own freedom.

The rationalistic language of Kantian self-legislation is quite alien to Hegel's version of ethical action. In "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate" Hegel characterizes the ethical attitude towards the law as "reconcilability" (*Versöhnlichkeit*). The disposition of reconcilability involves not simply obeying the law but entering into that law in ways

that are responsive to particular human contexts. He writes: "In reconcilability the law loses its form, the concept is displaced by life" (SCF 215). An objection to this might be that if we abandon "form" and immerse ourselves entirely in "life", no recognizable sense of the ethical could remain: ethical principles, after all, should be universal in the sense of being principles that are respected by all who might take themselves to be ethical beings. But Hegel is aware of this concern and immediately addresses it with the further claim that "what reconcilability thereby loses in respect of the universality which grips all particulars together in the concept is only a seeming loss and a genuine infinite gain on account of the wealth of living relations with the individuals (perhaps few) with whom it comes into connection" (SCF 215). In other words, the spirit of reconcilability opens us to the world of others and to what cannot be anticipated in general principles. A capacity for that openness is what Hegel regards as virtue.

Hegel elaborates further on the character of reconcilability by connecting it with a love that, at least in the example of Jesus, "goes *beyond* morality" (Wood 1990: 129). Hegel does not appear to recommend that all ethical agents can or should undertake to act through love. Yet the very meaning of acting in a way which is responsive to life is, at the very least, analogous to actions prompted by love. As Hegel puts it: it is the "extinction of law and duty in love, which Jesus signalizes as the highest morality" (SCF 223). Acting from a love of other human beings overcomes the "immorality of the 'positive' man" (SCF 224).

While contrasting the ethical character of Jesus with the positivity of ancient Judaism, Hegel is also implying a contrast with the formalism of Kantian ethics. And he is attempting to rescue morality from his great contemporary's conception. Hegel is clearly sympathetic to a familiar worry about Kant's apparent notion of the moral agent as moral only when acting under laws that exclude any content provided by our "pathological" (i.e. feeling-based) character. Hegel argues that one might be moral or virtuous in action while pursuing a purely positive ethics, in that one's actions could appear to be no different from those undertaken in the spirit of reconcilability and love, but one is not thereby an ethical person: "the agent's specific positive service", he writes, "has a limit which he cannot transcend and hence beyond it he is immoral" (SCF 224). Because such an agent is not virtuous – in the sense Hegel intends – ethical action, in that situation, is merely a matter of rule-following for the sake of those rules. Hegel's argument – one to which he will return in the *Philosophy of Right* – is that the "moral" agent does not exclude viciousness in merely endorsing the law. What is covered by the law does not exhaust the ethical environment and hence adherence to a few

principles leaves untouched, with its good and its evil, much of that environment.

As we have seen, then, positivity is the basis of the deficient form of the ethical life, a form which Hegel generally terms “morality”. In addition to the ways in which “morality” contradicts ethical virtue, Hegel also considers its correlative contradiction of our humanity. It is correlative because for Hegel the ethical life must encompass what we are, rather than confront us as a kind of external coercive force. Hegel interprets the biblical prescription “judge not that ye be not judged” as a warning against making “righteousness and love” subordinate to law. The consequence of that misguided subordination is to set up “an alien power over your deed” (SCF 238). The laws are brutal and indifferent to the living situation. The consequence of this is, Hegel claims, that we enslave our “sensuous side” and “individuality” to those laws. The contrast with Kant is once again evident. It is a contrast between the form of virtue – love – taught by Jesus and “the self-coercion of Kantian virtue” (SCF 244).

Virtuous action – ethical action – is neither rationalism nor legalism. Positively it is a willingness to adjust to the particularities of any given situation: to “the many-sidedness of the situation” (SCF 245). This adjustment, Hegel argues, does not come at the cost of the unity of the ethical agent. There is an enduring unity of the agent throughout its diverse encounters. The virtuous agent whose disposition is love identifies with the moral law as a living spirit, not as a rigid set of options which would narrow our capacity for ethical response. The agent whose concept of virtue is free of love, however, experiences conflict in any given situation in that it does not know which “virtue” it should act under and which it should disregard. It is not, therefore, a unified agent, it is merely an adherent of separate virtues. The virtue of the ethical agent, however, is infinitely flexible: “it will never have the same shape twice” (SCF 246).

Hegel is keenly aware that ethical life which takes the character of love excludes conventional characterizations of ethics as law or duty. Indeed, in Hegel the very idea of “the moral law” as something determinable (i.e. as issuing specific codes of behaviour) is absent. Instead, the moral law refers to the character of the virtuous agent. In this way it cannot be determined because it is always discovered only in unrepeatable concrete living circumstances. Furthermore, the actions of an agent cannot be produced by “reflection”, since reflection gives rise to “objectivity”, which Hegel regards as the annulment of love (SCF 253). Objectivity has the effect of detaching individuals from each other since their interconnection is now mediated through laws or principles.

As Hegel puts it in a contemporaneous essay on “Love”: “love completely destroys objectivity and thereby annuls and transcends reflection, deprives man’s opposite of all foreign character and discovers itself without any further defect. In love the separate does still remain, but as something united and no longer as something separate” (Hegel 1970b: 305).

The notion of ethical virtue Hegel sets out in “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate” refers to the interaction among individuals. But unless we are in possession of a character as remarkable as that of Jesus it is surely quite unrealistic to think that all interactions could meet Hegel’s standards. Hegel himself also sees this. Admitting to the appeal of “a nation of men related to one another by love” (SCF 278) he also acknowledges that such an arrangement, if it is to be found at all, exists only within small scale communities (SCF 279). Were it possible to conceive of a community as “ethical” it could not be one bonded by love.

Fichte – *Foundations of Natural Right*

During the period that Hegel was engaged with his affective conception of ethics, a significant philosophical innovation that would profoundly influence the future direction of his thought made its appearance on the German philosophical scene. This innovation, offered by J. G. Fichte, was the concept of recognition. Fichte was, perhaps, an unlikely source for this idea. In a number of works he had established himself as a polemical champion of the notion that independent-minded individuals possess the resources to be the authors of their own environments. The foundational work of this “subjective idealism”, as Hegel would later categorize it, was the *Science of Knowledge* (*Wissenschaftslehre*) of 1794. In two further works Fichte extended the theoretical reach of the *Science of Knowledge*, arguing that the book could provide the basis for an entirely new theory of law and of ethics. The two books were, respectively, *Foundations of Natural Right* (1796/97) and *System of the Science of Ethics* (1798). It was in *Foundations of Natural Right* that the concept of recognition was proposed. Fichte contended that legal individuality is the product of a network of contracts that are maintained through a process of mutual recognition. Legal individuals are free, rational beings, a status they maintain only through recognition. Fichte sets out the dynamics of a recognitive relationship as follows: “Now he can recognize me as a rational being only under the condition that I treat him as one, in accordance with my concept of him as a rational being. Thus, I impose the same

consistency upon myself, and his action is conditioned by mine. We stand in reciprocal interaction with regard to the consistency of our thinking and our acting: our thinking is consistent with our acting and my thinking and acting are consistent with his" (Fichte 2000: 48–9). Individuals who decide not to fulfil some specific contract are, on one level, simply violators of the law, but more profoundly they are beings who problematize their legal individuality. These actors withdraw from the recognitive interactions which constitute them as legal individuals. As Fichte puts it: "Anyone who does not fulfil this contract is not a part of it and anyone who is a part of it necessarily fulfils it entirely. If someone exists apart from this contract, then he stands outside every rightful relation whatsoever and is rightfully excluded altogether from any reciprocity with other beings of his kind in the sensible world" (*ibid.*: 180). Although Fichte's account is limited to a theory of the legal subject who enters into social contracts, its potential as a theory of ethical interaction was quickly seen by Hegel. The intersubjectivity that is suggested in Hegel's affective ethics as "a spiritual union" but which demands too much as a social theory finds a new avenue of theorization in the concept of recognition.

System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit

In *System of Ethical Life* (1802/3) and the so-called *First Philosophy of Spirit* (1803/4) Hegel begins to incorporate the concept of recognition into his account of ethics, thereby superseding his early affection-based theory of the ethical life. In certain respects his thinking is not far from Fichte's: recognition is invoked to explain the status of legal individuality and Hegel – like Fichte – devoted a significant part of his discussion to the relationship between that individuality and property. Various social conflicts are represented as violations of recognition (e. g. theft; *SEL* 175).

However, Hegel adds to the Fichtean account in at least two fundamental ways. He makes striking claims for the intersubjective constitution of individuals. Hegel maintains that when individuals understand themselves to be constituted within an ethical order, they will transcend the limited perspective of a self-constituting individuality. The individual's "objectivity", Hegel writes, "is not apprehended by an artificial independent consciousness". Rather, this self-awareness – Hegel refers to it in this context as "intellectual intuition" – "is alone realized by and in ethical life" and in "ethical life alone he sees the spirit of his spirit in and through the ethical order" (*SEL* 143). Hegel is keen to emphasize the constitutive power of this relationship and contrasts

it sharply with the empirical account of the individual's external (i.e. non-constitutive) relationship to a community of others: "in empirical consciousness" that interactivity "is posited only as relation" (*SEL* 144). In the ethical life "the individual intuitively himself as himself in every other individual; he reaches supreme subject-objectivity" (*SEL* 144). Using this more formal account of the ethical life, Hegel deduces some of the familiar virtues, such as courage, honesty and trust. And echoing claims made in earlier works, he accounts for virtue as a unity of the "outer and inner" of the agent. Virtue in this sense excludes, by definition, that separation of the two which characterizes hypocrisy (*SEL* 148).

The second major departure from the Fichtean theory is brought about by the further consideration of history. It might be said that Fichte's account of recognition is synchronic: it pertains to the network of lawful interactions among citizens. Hegel wants additionally to consider recognition as a developmental phenomenon, one which gains its legitimacy only through some kind of mutually satisfying solution to a struggle. According to Axel Honneth, Hegel's effort "to make Fichte's model of recognition more dynamic" underpins the notion of a productive struggle which "leads, as a moral medium, from an underdeveloped state of ethical life to a more mature level of ethical relations" (Honneth 1995: 17). There is no prior criterion of a satisfactory outcome to the struggle since it is not a process of negotiation between fixed points, but rather one in which each party is transformed, in ways they cannot anticipate, through the various phases of that struggle. The struggle is understood as the effort of the individual to reverse some act of "denial" of that individual's "particularity". "Denial here", Hegel writes, "is an injury to life" (*SEL* 137). Hegel posits acts of confrontation as responses to that denial. He discusses the emergence of "reciprocal *recognition* ... the positing of one's own consciousness as a singular totality of consciousness in another singular totality of consciousness" (*FPS* 236) as necessarily prompted by the experience of "injury" (*FPS* 238).

Phenomenology of Spirit

The struggle that Hegel was thinking about is given its most comprehensive statement in the famous master-slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1806/7). What Hegel believes that dialectic effectively tells us is that the achievement of the ethical life is an arduous process. Contrary to the notion that modernity corrupts our natural capacities for ethical life – a notion Hegel himself, as we have seen, once held – that life must be realized through a process of growth, of a developing

consciousness of what it is that produces the most stable and satisfying conditions of one's freedom. And those conditions are not *ad hoc* arrangements between particular individuals: ethical life is embodied in intersubjectively constituted institutions in which every individual within a rational and freedom-generating community is already involved. Through these intersubjective institutions the individual understands "the other" not as a limitation of its freedom but as a condition of that freedom since it is only within those institutions that recognition is possible.³

The master–slave dialectic is an imaginative philosophical reconstruction of the beginning of the struggles that will lead eventually to the concept of the ethical life. Essentially, the struggle involves the growing and transformative dependence of two initially independent and mutually indifferent consciousnesses. The various phases of the relationship between the two consciousnesses are unstable. A demand for a more satisfactory arrangement is produced by the breakdown of each phase. Hegel sees those failures as inevitable so long as each consciousness "does not see the other as an essential being" (*PS* 111). The story ends without reconciliation or the equality of statuses. Once the very possibility of an intersubjective world has been introduced – that is, by the appearance of more than one individual consciousness in the same space – relationships of recognition alone can ultimately provide that world with its sufficient conditions, that is, with the conditions that will support individual demands for freedom. "Self-consciousness" is the name Hegel gives to the individuals' awareness of themselves as free beings. He writes: "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being recognized" (*PS* 111, translation adjusted). Without our knowing it, the history of our efforts to establish a community in which "self-consciousness" is possible is the history of the appearance of recognition. This claim radicalizes the theory first developed by Fichte in that recognition does not refer simply to the sphere of the legal personality but to the very ontology of what it is to be a modern human being. Such a being is an agent that understands both its capacity for freedom and that its freedom is possible only in an intersubjectively structured world, in contrast to the socially empty spaces of the first consciousness Hegel identifies in the master–slave dialectic.

In a subsequent section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel explores the failure of a variety of historical social models to provide the conditions in which individuals could experience freedom while acting within the established norms of their societies (the discussion of Antigone highlights those tensions in the "ethical" yet naïve world of

the Greeks).⁴ We must wait until the *Philosophy of Right* to gain a better view of what Hegel regards as the model in which those tensions vanish and the ethical agent is not set at odds with the community.

In the *Phenomenology* Hegel carries forward his claims about intersubjective recognition into a number of criticisms of the “moral view of the world”. The moral consciousness, he writes, is “completely locked up within itself” and it perceives its “other” purely negatively. It relates to its other “with perfect freedom and indifference” (PS 365). Hegel argues that a division is set up by the Kantian model of morality between moral duty and nature. By “nature” in this context, Hegel means “the happiness of performance and the enjoyment of achievement” of an action undertaken (PS 366). Separated from nature in that sense, duty must act without any desire for happiness, a thesis which suggests to Hegel an incompatibility in Kant’s theory between duty and “existence” (PS 366). Kant did attempt to accommodate happiness to duty when he postulated the existence of God. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* he writes: “Accordingly, the existence of a cause of all nature, distinct from nature, which contains the ground of this connection, namely, of the exact correspondence of happiness with morality, is also *postulated*” (Kant 1997: 104/AA 5: 125). But according to Hegel, this postulate does not integrate happiness with duty, as nature remains “external” to duty (PS 367). And since, as Kant puts it, happiness proportionate to morality is “an object of hope” (Kant 1997: 107/AA 5: 129), Hegel – a “this-worldly philosopher” (Inwood 1983: 444) – points out that the realization of happiness “has to be projected into a future infinitely remote” (PS 368). What remains, though, is “the lack of harmony between the consciousness of duty and reality” (PS 373). Hegel’s argument is that the moral perfection required by Kant’s purism cannot be found in reality, and that produces the mistaken outcome of “no moral existence in reality” (PS 373).

Philosophy of Right

Hegel’s reflections on the nature of ethical life culminate in the *Philosophy of Right* (1820/21). In that work Hegel revisits his longstanding strategy of contrasting ethics with morality. That contrast has a distinctive function in the *Philosophy of Right*, though, as Hegel now no longer opposes cold morality with the ethics of the living spirit. Instead, he wants to establish the necessary intersubjective conditions of genuine morality – ethics – which alone can help us to avoid the explanatory limitations of what he identifies mainly with Kantian morality. The contrast is between *Sittlichkeit* – the ethical life – and *Moralität* – moral practices considered in isolation from the ethical life. Hegel prepares us

for the advantages of the ethical life by explaining early in the text what he means by freedom. The notion of a will which is free of all determinations is sometimes understood (exclusively by philosophers) to be the essence of a genuinely free will. But Hegel dismisses this notion as “*negative freedom*” and “the freedom of the void” (PR §5). The notion of freedom based solely in a pure subject (i.e. one without determinations) means artificially separating the will of the individual from the environment in which that individual lives. At the same time, freedom is lost if the individual is understood to be fully determined by that environment. An accommodation between these two explanatory extremes must be found. That accommodation is found within the fully realized ethical life.

Hegel holds that in the ethical life the agent effectively sublates “the contradiction between subjectivity and objectivity” because what that agent voluntarily wills is what is objectively right: the will of the agent remains “with itself in this objectivity” (PR §28); that is, it is at one with what is objectively right. This, Hegel believes, is concrete freedom in that the ethical life encompasses the real wills of actual historical agents (in contrast to the essential will of purely rational agents). In a community in which there is no antagonism between what is objectively right and the volitions of the agent, there is freedom, a freedom which Hegel characterizes as being “at home in the world” (PR §4A).

In the *Philosophy of Right*, the notion of morality follows Hegel’s discussion of abstract right. Once again, morality is the designation for a limiting account of ethics. Abstract right is the sphere of the agent within a system of laws. Fulfilment of one’s role within that sphere requires no more than simple adherence to the laws. It is, minimally, an exercise in external compliance: the internal state of agents – the fact that they admire or agree with those laws – is not a consideration. Morality, by sharp contrast, refers to the perspective of the subject as an independent agent on what that subject ought to do. Hegel holds that the “moral point of view” determines “the *person* as a *subject*” (PR §105). The moral subject is free and understands itself as a being defined by “*self-determination*” (PR §107). Its actions are its mode of self-determination. Hegel speaks of “the right of the subjective will”, by which he means what can rightfully be ascribed to the individual moral subject as what “is *its own*” (PR §107).

Hegel does not sketch out the essence of morality in order then to reject it altogether. What he wants to show is that morality conceived in this typical way is “abstract, circumscribed and formal” (PR §108). It does not go far enough. Because it bases morality on “the right of the subjective will” (PR §107), the question of what is to count as moral

is limited to “the subjectivity of the will” (*PR* §108). As W. H. Walsh expresses Hegel’s worry: “To lay exclusive emphasis on the personal side of action is to forget that an action is carried out in the public world, and is of interest for other reasons than that it embodies or fails to embody good will” (Walsh 1969: 13).

Hegel endorses Kant’s notion that the character of the will of the moral agent is that of the good. It is this which gives the moral will “unqualified obligation” to act in accordance with the good, because it is good. Kant is right, therefore, to perceive moral “duty” as duty for its own sake (*PR* §133). The question “*what is duty?*” (*PR* §134), however, exposes the limits of Kant’s rationalist approach. Hegel argues that Kantian morality refers only to the condition of the subjective will and understands morality as the exercise of autonomy, that is, of action whose moral content is determinable solely by standards of rational coherence which can motivate the agent as a rational being. He holds that Kant’s position is ultimately “an empty formalism” (*PR* §135). This charge refers primarily but not exclusively to Kant’s notion of the “categorical imperative”. The categorical imperative determines the moral content of a desire by testing it as a universal law. Its formalism has been noted by many readers, but Hegel’s broader point seems to be that the perspective of morality possesses only immanent resources. It will, in that way, always be “empty” as it cannot determine what we should do. Hegel even claims that “it is possible to justify any wrong or immoral mode of action” (*PR* §135) if the principle of consistency alone is to count as the standard of what is moral.

The failure of the moral point of view demands an alternative grounding, one that is not restricted to understanding morality through an analysis of the form of a moral judgement. Likewise, the idea of conscience is compromised when explained within the purely moral perspective. “True conscience”, according to Hegel, “is the disposition to will what is *good in and for itself*” (*PR* §137). Willing alone cannot produce moral content. For Hegel, the notion of the autonomy of the will can be defended only when we theorize it through “the concept of ethics” (*PR* §135). The objectively existing principles of morality inform the will. The ethical point of view involves the “union” of “the objective system of these principles and duties” with the subject. Hegel has emphasized the right each individual has to conscience and to moral freedom. The union he describes here is therefore not a renunciation of the individual moral will but an explanation of how it actually works as a genuinely moral will (i.e. when it is determining which principles it will act under and when those principles have motivating force for that individual). If instead the subject should turn from those

principles and towards what Hegel describes as “pure inwardness”, it becomes “capable of being *evil*” since in its own “abstract” certainty of itself it gives priority to its own principles rather than those that already have objectivity (*PR* §139).

The contents of “the objective sphere of ethics”, Hegel explains, “are *laws and institutions which have being in and for themselves*” (*PR* §144). Hegel means only those laws and institutions that are consistent with freedom. But ethical agents do not simply choose from the objectively existing values that they encounter in their well-ordered societies. Hegel stresses that ethical action is not a coincidence of internal preferences with objective norms. The ethical agent, rather, is constituted in the synthesis of those two dimensions. The dialectical relationship of individual and institutions can be described in the following way: “We cannot articulate the norms of subjective freedom without showing how they are actualized in the institutional structures of social life. And we cannot describe the institutions or practices of social freedom without detailing how these institutions are constructed from the intentional activity of those moral subjects whose behaviours such institutions comprise” (Knowles 2002: 224). The relationship of the subjective and the objective allows us, Hegel thinks, to overcome the difficulties of explaining purpose and intention within a purely “moral” theoretical framework. For Hegel the ethical agent is always already an individual within – not external to – institutions and laws. These are that individual’s framing resources when the question “what duty?” occurs.

Hegel argues that freedom is truly experienced in ethical action because there is a unity of the concrete agent and the duties that agent performs. Whereas the moral point of view understands a duty as the imposition of some kind of “limitation”, ethical duty, Hegel claims, “liberates” the individual from “dependence of mere natural drives”, from “the burden” of reflecting as an isolated individual on what one should desire (*PR* §149). The individual’s life within existing institutions and laws sets the scope of what is at stake in coming to any ethical decision.

According to Hegel, ethical action within a community “whose relations are fully developed and actualized” is *virtue* (*PR* §150). In view of the contrast he made in his early works between morality and virtue, it is perhaps surprising that he characterizes virtue as rectitude. He writes: “In the ethical community, it is easy to say *what* someone must do and *what* the duties are which he has to fulfil in order to be virtuous” (*ibid.*). When the institutions and laws are just, the ethical person has no difficulty in acting upon them. Ethical action becomes

habitual and “appears as a *second nature*” (PR §151). We recall that Hegel had once attempted to develop an account of virtue that freed it of all legalism and prescription. The difference in the earlier work, though, is that Hegel was then proposing a conception of ethics where the qualities characteristic of loving response were prior to any settled or enabling institutional life. (In the *Philosophy of Right*, ethical relations that possess the property of love are ascribed only to the distinctive institution of the family.) A virtuous disposition might be sensitively attuned to the singularity of each ethical situation, but in the early work that surely did not imply the habitual application of established norms. Hegel offers a thought, though, which helps us to see the differences between these two quite contrasting contexts for virtue. The capacity for “individual discretion”, he claims, “appears more frequently in uncivilized societies and communities” (PR §150). Virtue must be a matter of “the distinctive natural genius of individuals” where no satisfactory ethical order has been established. This contrasts with virtue as second nature within a modern ethical community.

The *Philosophy of Right*, then, can be seen as Hegel’s most advanced account of ethics in that it finely balances, under a cohesive theory, a number of elements that were evidently of sustained significance through earlier works. Those elements are: affirmation of the modern demand for rational freedom (not compliance or mere adherence); ethics as a way of life (not a reflective detachment from that life, as it is allegedly for Kant); an account of our intersubjective being (opposing the notion of individual self-constitution) that is something more than romantic affection (in contrast to Hegel’s own early view); and the crucial importance of the right form of society based on those recognitively sustained institutions which alone enable individual freedom.

Notes

- 1 See Inwood (1992: 91–93) for a discussion of the philosophical significance of the etymologies of *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität*.
- 2 The relevant pieces are contained in Hegel (1984a).
- 3 As Ludwig Siep puts it: “Consciousness of individuality can never arise in the isolated individual self. Only through another consciousness, mediated by its utterances, can I know who I am” (Siep 1992: 156). And further: “The individual must know itself to be recognized as a free self within the institutions of the nation” (*ibid.*: 157).
- 4 See Speight (2001: ch. 2) for an analysis of Antigone in Hegel’s idea of reflective ethical life.

5 Political philosophy

Thom Brooks

G. W. F. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is widely considered to be one of the most important contributions to the history of political philosophy, but it is also among the more complex.¹ This chapter aims to clarify the distinctiveness of Hegel's project and illuminate its widely influential discussions about freedom, recognition, the individual's relation to the state and punishment, as well as to provide a clear understanding of the *Philosophy of Right* within Hegel's philosophical system through a close reading of this text.²

Political philosophy as *philosophy*

Most key texts in the history of political thought can be appreciated as stand-alone contributions. John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* with its promotion of natural rights can be understood independently of Locke's other texts. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is very different, and this fact is made clear from its preface: "This textbook is a more extensive, and in particular a more systematic, exposition of the same basic concepts which ... are already contained in a previous work designed to accompany my lectures, namely, my *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*" (PR 9). On Hegel's self-understanding of his project, we must interpret his political philosophy within his philosophical system – and this is presented in the *Encyclopaedia* in an outline form. Hegel regularly elaborated other parts of his philosophical system in university lectures, including work on art, history, religion and the history of philosophy. Hegel reminds us on each occasion that his examination of a particular topic is not to be understood independently of the wider philosophical system of which each forms a part. For Hegel, political philosophy is not an isolated subject-matter, but a part of philosophy writ large (K. R. Westphal 1993).

This *systematic* nature of his philosophical contributions is difficult to appreciate by contemporary standards. Few, if any, philosophers today create and defend philosophical systems that attempt to unify logic, nature, ethics and other topics within the kind of systematic structure that Hegel provides. Furthermore, it can be more difficult to grasp the subtleties of a philosophical system where interpretation of any one part requires a knowledge of how that part fits within the larger whole.

The systematic nature of Hegel's philosophy matters because it underpins how one should attempt to reconstruct it. Unlike most other philosophical texts, Hegel's does not start from its own beginning, but it instead takes off from a point within a larger, systematic whole. The following section will address this somewhat unique approach to doing philosophy and highlight the issue of where the reader finds himself or herself in the dialectic at each point. While this requires careful study to best grasp each step in Hegel's argument, it is crucial to understanding how his project unfolds and its distinctive contributions to political philosophy. One must always recall that, for Hegel, thinking about political philosophy concerns doing *philosophy* and so the question how political philosophy fits within a larger philosophical structure is crucial.³

One final, important note is that Hegel's way of doing philosophy involves a kind of rational reconstruction of the world. Perhaps the most famous passage of the *Philosophy of Right* helps illustrate this well: "What is rational is actual; what is actual is rational" (*PR* 20). This passage has been misunderstood widely despite Hegel's efforts to clarify such mistakes (*EnLogic* §6R). Hegel is not claiming that what exists is rational. He is instead referring to the idea that reason can help us discern the *actuality* in our *reality*. For example, our world consists of many political states and each might be said to "exist", but each is only "actual" in Hegel's understanding to the degree it satisfies certain rational commitments. One looks to one's world to discern its inner rationality where some practices and institutions will be found more "rational" (and so more "actual") than others. Two states may exist, but one can be more "actual" than the other on account of its rationality. Hegel's understanding of rationality and its implications will play an important role in the explanation of his political philosophy. This is made clear from the first sentence of the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*: "The subject-matter of the philosophical science of right is the Idea of right – the concept of right and its actualization" (§1). The central focus here is on Hegel's understanding of "right" and its actualization within Hegel's philosophical (and to his mind "scientific") system.

Freedom

Hegel's political philosophy is first and foremost about *freedom*. His *Philosophy of Right* is a translation of the word *Recht* for "right". *Recht* is open to multiple meanings in German which Hegel exploits in his usage. *Recht* can mean "right" in terms of "it is *right* that all citizens can vote in the election" signifying a moral property: the moral goodness of democratic participation by citizens. Or it can mean "right" as "it is a *right* that all citizens can vote in the election" highlighting a legal property: the legal entitlement of citizens to democratic decision-making. Hegel's discussion of "right" can then be understood as both a moral right and a legal right where the latter may help "actualize" the former. This is broadly consistent within a natural law framework whereby law and morality are seen as connected (Brooks 2012a). Hegel's discussion expands on his earlier comments provided in his philosophical system published in his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, where Hegel originally presented these ideas about freedom, the free will and right in outline.⁴

Right is understood as "the realm of actualized freedom" where our freedom is transformed from merely thinking into something that becomes manifest (§§4, 4R). Hegel attempts to overcome the particular challenge of determining what he calls "the free will which wills the free will" (§27). The issue is this: if each person possesses a free will, then every individual is capable of being free. But how can we know when a free being acts freely and not merely arbitrarily? We might contrast human freedom with non-human animals. My cat and I make various choices throughout the day. Hegel's point is that my cat makes choices, but lacks substantive freedom because it acts in relation to its immediate cravings for food and sleep. Human beings alone can enjoy freedom in a more substantive sense because we do not merely exercise choice, but possess some mastery over the choices we make. It is not so much that I have a choice, but what I choose that is an issue.⁵ The problem then is to distinguish cases of merely arbitrary cravings from exercises of freedom.

Hegel argues that freedom springs from the activity of mutual recognition between persons. If human beings possess free will, they are capable of freedom. The first point to consider is that no one person can be his or her own judge about whether a choice is made freely or arbitrarily. This is because such judgements would be no less arbitrary than the arbitrary choices that need to be distinguished from genuinely free choices. Hegel argues that if we take seriously the need to determine the boundaries of freedom, then it is essential that we find

a more secure basis for making such judgements. He claims that the free will must be grounded in the will of another (§75). But what does this mean and how does it work?

Hegel illustrates this important idea about mutual recognition in his discussion of Property that immediately follows the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*. A common mistake is to think that he is considering rights to property as such, rather than as a mere illustration about how we can determine the contours of human freedom. This is despite his early caution that his discussion about property concerns how it “may constitute the sphere of its freedom” and that “the rational aspect of property is to be found not in the satisfaction of needs but in the superseding of mere subjectivity of personality” (§§41, 41A). The rationality of property does not consist in its capacity to satisfy our immediate cravings (for then property would appear as responsive to a mere animal want); it consists rather in its capacity to allow us to “supersede” our “mere subjectivity” – property is instrumental to our discovery of how we can improve upon a mere *subjective* judgement about freedom.

Property is important for Hegel because it can express some aspect of who we are through our choices. Our property is *ours* and constitutes some significance as such. Consider how the belongings we possess can express something about what we value within our available means. Hegel uses colourful language to express this idea – that we give our possessions “a soul other than that which it previously had; I give it my soul” (§44A). But again, this “soul” that I confer on my objects is my individual stamp whereby I demarcate things as “mine” and as part of my individuality (§59). The importance of my property for me is understood in terms of the values I assign them. So a thing’s *value* is a part of the exercise of my freedom and expression about how I choose to assign importance (§63). Nonetheless, the existence of a thing’s value is weak and limited to my own subjective tastes. We are unable to confirm whether such a choice is purely arbitrary, or connected to my genuine freedom.

Freedom is only possible through mutual recognition with another person. It is through someone else’s *recognition* of a thing as *mine* that its existence becomes more “actual” and determinate (§§71, 75). My judgements about objects as my property and the value I assign to them lose their purely subjective character when confirmed by another person. Mutual recognition makes possible objective judgement. Consider that my cat is *more* mine when not only I claim my cat as mine, but this is confirmed by others. Or that my car as mine is no longer a statement about personal taste or aspiration, but becomes more

determinate and more certain as others agree with me that my car is indeed mine. Hegel's point is not that we must always agree, but rather that agreement by persons through mutual recognition is a process by which free human beings interact with each other as free and through which their freedom can be understood and made more concrete. Note that wide agreement does not entail that there can never be error; the point rather is that essential disagreement is a barrier to any concept of right becoming "actual". For Hegel, that which is most right may be actual in its rationality, but not actual as real and having its existence in the world – it remains an ideal or perhaps a mere dream. This connection between freedom and mutual recognition underpins the arguments that follow about how freedom in a just state should be conceived and upheld.

We have seen that the section about Property concerns our values, possessions and rights, but it is focused on the development of a particular conception of human freedom, and not on the alleged importance of property in satisfying our immediate needs. So Hegel's discussion about property addresses some common themes found in alternative theories of property and takes a generally unique and easily overlooked perspective that provides a new understanding of property and its importance.

Crime and punishment

Hegel's discussion about punishment – which follows his discussion of Property – works similarly. He discusses ideas about wrongs and how they should be addressed using language reminiscent of what we might find in penal theory, but his perspective is distinctive and very different from the perspective of other work on the topic.

Hegel's analysis focuses on the concept of "Wrong" (*das Unrecht*), the absence of right. Wrongs come in three categories. The first is the unintentional wrong. In the case of unintentional wrong, we have "collisions of rights" between contesting parties because of a disagreement based on a mistake (§84). If mutual recognition is required for the possibility of more objective judgements about freedom, then agreement can have real importance where relevant for helping us determine the contours of our freedom. This does not require that we always agree or that we should always endeavour towards agreement. But wrongs based on disagreement because of some kind of mistake are thought to be the least severe kinds of wrong, because all parties are engaged with each other on similar terms (§85).

Deception is the second category and a worse kind of wrong. This is because both parties appeal to a similar ground and yet one misleads the other. Deception is not a mistake about what should be right, but instead involves a claim to a shared commitment that is nevertheless an insincere claim. Hegel argues that there should be no penalty attached to cases where people engage in unintentional wrongs, but he argues otherwise regarding deceptions (§88A).

Crime is the third and final category of wrong and the worst kind of all. We must pay careful attention to the fact that what Hegel is calling “Crime” is distinct from the criminal law. Crime does not involve a mistaken judgement or a deception; in mistaken judgement or deception, there is some appeal to the common right shared by all through mutual recognition. Mutual recognition based on a mistake is easily rectified and mutual recognition involving deception is at least an engagement with others through mutual recognition. Crime is an essential breakdown of connections where the possibility of mutual recognition is denied others. Hegel says that crime is a denial of right because it fails to engage in any mutual recognition with others (§95). So crime is not a mere disagreement, but rather a full disengagement. This is then a source for major problems: if we were to disengage with others, then mutual recognition would not occur and so we would be unable to determine the development of our freedom – free institutions would become impossible as would the existence of our free individuality.

But what exactly is a “crime”? Hegel refers to the failure of individuals to honour contractual stipulations where one party refuses to satisfy the terms agreed upon between private individuals. This requires a “restoration of right” whereby this refusal to accept what has been agreed upon is corrected so that mutual recognition is restored and with it the possibility of freedom and its actualization as “right” (§99).

Crime is *not* the criminal law. Note that Hegel’s discussion considers only the interaction of two persons with one other and is abstracted from their wider social and political context – this helps explain why Hegel’s discussion about “right” concerning property, mutual recognition and wrong falls within a sphere that he labels “abstract right”; he gives it this label in order to highlight its partial, non-contextual and abstract character. Abstract right is the sphere of the interaction of two persons. It is not a sphere that includes a legal system, police force, judiciary, a state or prisons. Much of Hegel’s discussion is purely theoretical, although he also makes clear that crimes in the *legal* perspective will build off the essential nature of crime as a failure of recognition that requires some form of restoration. So theft is understood as a failure of someone to recognize the property rights of others

and murder is a failure to recognize the right of another to his or her life. The essential point, once again, is we must remember our place within the overall philosophical system – within this *systematic* reading and understanding of Hegel’s argument – and recall that even though Hegel may use some familiar terms regarding wrongs (such as “crime” and “punishment”), his understanding of these terms differs from our common usages (Brooks 2001; 2004; 2012b; 2013: ch. 3).

Morality

Hegel believes that our reflections about mutual recognition lead us to move to a new sphere for consideration. “Abstract right” ends with the acknowledgement that there is a problem where persons refuse to honour terms agreed upon through mutual recognition, for mutual recognition plays a central role in providing us with a process to make more determinate judgements about our freedom. The problem here is that we have not yet considered “the moral point of view” of the individuals concerned (§105). In abstract right, it did not matter what specifically our principle or intention was – what mattered was that there was some intention, such as the intention to recognize one another as free persons (§106A). Hegel’s morality – or “the moral point of view” – is an attempt to “look within” at our subjective morality in order to clarify the ways in which we can and should act as free and responsible human beings for the purpose of building a more objective picture (§§107, 108).

Yet again – and we should no longer find this surprising – Hegel discusses a topic using familiar terms in unfamiliar ways. Moral philosophy is the stuff of “purpose and responsibility” (§§115–18), “intention and welfare” (§§119–28) and “the good and the conscience” (§§129–41). Hegel notes that free persons should be accountable only for actions for which they have responsibility (§117). Free persons should accept responsibility for consequences flowing from their choices (or omissions) as expressions of their intentions (§118). This discussion brings out what Hegel calls “the right of subjective freedom”, understood as a right to express one’s inner will through his or her actions, such as one’s choosing of an occupation (§§124, 124R). We can only be free through the intentions and actions of ours that are freely chosen. One more basic way this could be achieved is through our possession and use of property, as seen in abstract right. Another, more substantial and yet elusive way is through our intentions and purposes more generally.

Hegel’s discussion about morality rests on an unusual view about what morality is about. This is brought out well in his famous critique

of Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy. Hegel claims that Kantian ethics is little more than "an empty formalism" that rests on "an empty rhetoric of duty for duty's sake" (§135R). Much has been said about this passage and almost all of what has been said overlooks Hegel's central criticism. Commentators have regularly focused on Hegel's concern that the Kantian categorical imperative (the imperative that each person should "act so that maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle in the giving of universal law") determines morality through an empty formula that gives no regard to its content (Kant 1997). Therefore, according to Kant's categorical imperative, murder is immoral because we cannot all murder each other at once and so murder is not an action that we could all perform at one time. One part of Hegel's concern is that murder is wrong, not because it is merely inconsistent with universal actions, but rather because it is *wrong*. Note that Hegel is critiquing Kant on Hegelian terms, such as the idea that what is wrong is rooted in a failure to engage in mutual recognition and a denial of rights to others. Kant gets things incorrect because he understands wrongs in a different way.

A more general and central problem of Kantian ethics is that it is "the merely moral point of view" (§135R). Its problem is that it is *moral philosophy*. Now this may seem like an odd problem, but again consider how Hegel uses familiar terms in unfamiliar ways. Moral philosophy for most philosophers today is about reflecting on normative considerations relating to the world. Few, if any, moral philosophers would agree that moral philosophy is utterly disconnected from the world as we find it.

But this view (the view that moral philosophy is disconnected from the world as we find it) is indeed Hegel's distinctive view about moral philosophy. Morality involves an abstract consideration of the moral self as such; it considers our relations to others as *abstract*, non-contextual and beyond the scope of any connection with institutions. Moral philosophy is what we do when we think about ourselves, so to speak, while sitting in an armchair. By contrast, normative reflection about our relations to others *in context* is a different project altogether; what many might call *applied ethics* or *political philosophy*, Hegel calls *Ethical Life*. Essentially, the problem of Kantian ethics is not merely that it is formulistic, but that it is a moral philosophy from which Kant seeks to develop a political philosophy.⁶

In other words, the reason why moral philosophy is limited and incapable of full application to the real world is because that is simply not how Hegel understands moral philosophy. For Hegel, we first

reflect on how we can locate a more secure basis for determining whether our actions are free or arbitrary. We think about ourselves in abstract right in abstract terms and thus as removed from our social and political contexts. We consider our relations to others as relation of one and another, for the purpose of discovering the importance of mutual recognition and how such recognition might work. We next consider ourselves as individuals in relation to others, but again in abstract terms without reflection about our concrete situations. The purpose of morality as such is to clarify our self-understanding as purposeful and responsible persons. Hegel believes these steps are required prior to our starting an examination of ourselves in our concrete reality, as members of family working in civil society within the political state. This third and final sphere (the sphere of family, civil society and the state) is provided in what Hegel calls “ethical life”, to which we now turn.

The family

Ethical life is the sphere where we realize “the Idea of freedom as a living good” (§142). It is a higher sphere of freedom because only here do we consider ourselves not in the abstract, but rather within our concrete reality. The first instance of this concrete reality, for Hegel, is the family. The family is conceived as a traditional union of a man and woman with children. The claim is that together they represent a higher, more developed scenario of mutual recognition where each recognizes each other as not merely persons, but as members of a family with associated obligations to each other.

One way in which the family involves a special kind of mutual recognition involves its foundation in marriage. This is not a mere agreement about contractual stipulations over possessions, but a shared “union” based on love where each identifies with the other through an act of free choice recognized by the other (§§161, 162). Unfortunately, it is essential that the family is composed of a man and woman at its heart. One reason for this is that Hegel saw men and women as possessing essential differences which complemented each other (§§166, 166A). A same-sex couple on his view would fail to obtain the same goods that come from building on different strengths available to heterosexual couples.

A second reason why the family involves a special kind of mutual recognition has to do with the fact that, for Hegel, the family is a natural representation of a logical development (§§168A). For Hegel, logic develops through the creative unity arising from difference. It is

therefore unsurprising that, for Hegel, persons with essential differences (e.g. such as the differences between men and women) can conceive children (§173A).

Neither of the reasons given for why the family involves a special kind of mutual recognition is entirely compelling. But one must remember that Hegel is arguing for a traditional view of the family on *non-traditional* grounds. The traditional family is “the ideal”, not because of any particular religious or cultural doctrine, but rather because of a creative unity of difference which gives life to the Hegelian dialectic and which (literally) includes the marrying of complementary opposites. It is also well worth noting that Hegel himself did not enjoy a traditional family; and so he is not attempting to justify the particular conception of the family that he himself enjoyed.

A key element of Hegel’s perspective is that in the family our understanding of mutual recognition is crystallized. Here we engage in mutual recognition within a specific context of shared affection, while pursuing familial support through our essential determinations as husband, wife and child, and where mutual recognition requires a system of mutual support focused on the upbringing of children.

Civil society

Civil society is a sphere of work and associational life beyond the family (and, unfortunately, it is the sole province of men, on Hegel’s account). It is conceived as a further development of mutual recognition beyond the family unit. Whereas members of a family are united in a bond of *affection*, members of civil society, for Hegel, are connected in a bond of *common purposes*.

Civil society comprises a world where individuals engage each other as individuals – not as members of their families, but as members of some trade or activity sharing the same employment or working in a civil service, such as in the police force. Each is driven to work in civil society because of “subjective need”, which is the desire to provide for each person’s family (§189). Hegel accepts the idea of a market economy and says that through it a division of labour is created; this is welcome, according to Hegel, because it permits individuals to pursue their subjective freedom in a new way (§198). Each likewise satisfies the wants of others through the pursuit of his own work (§199).

Hegel argues for three different classes of workers, or what he calls “estates”. The first estate – the “substantial estate” – includes the farmers who depend on the cultivation of their soil for their livelihood (§203). The second is the “estate of trade and industry” which includes those

who engage in mass production, craftsmen and finance (§204). Whereas the first estate finds itself dependent on its land, the second estate is dependent on itself – and so the second estate is closer than the first to achieving “freedom” (§204A). The third estate is “the universal estate” of the civil service (§205). Their livelihood is earned by the support of all, as they work for everyone’s benefit: their “private interest is satisfied through working for the universal” (§205).

Hegel’s discussion of civil society includes an illuminating discussion of law and society where he begins to revisit earlier topics, such as crime and punishment. He argues that the “objective actuality of right” consists in its being “universally valid” (§210). Our rights are deficient in their objective actuality insofar as they fail to command the mutual agreement of others. The legal system is one important effort to clarify and make more determinate a system of rights. Rather than consisting in private agreements about what each of us is free or not free to do, the law consists in an attempt to specify the appropriate conditions for guiding our common practices (§211). One consequence of this account of law is Hegel’s endorsement of codification, rather than a “common law” reasoning; for Hegel, codification is superior at specifying the conditions which guide our common practices, since the common law is too open and indeterminate. Hegel also recognizes that there may be an important normative space between (a) what the law claims *as right*, and (b) what *is right* – this is a distinction already highlighted at the beginning of our discussion in this chapter. The law is an attempt to specify our shared (and thus our more objective and *less subjective*) views about right and it is a project that requires constant revision as we try to bring our ideals into actual practice.⁷

Nowhere is this give-and-take (between ideals and practice) more apparent than in our understanding of crime and punishment. Hegel now considers “crime” in a more familiar sense as part of a criminal law. He recognizes that crimes are failures of mutual recognition, but what is understood to be such a failure is contextual and shifts over time. Witchcraft and wizardry were once serious crimes because of a perception about their intrinsic wrongness; this perception is no longer widely shared and so it is no longer operative in the criminal law. The perception about wrongness informs not only criminalization but sentencing and so it is influenced by the self-certainty of a particular community. Witchcraft and wizardry are no longer perceived to be the grave threats to society that they once were perceived to be; and this, for Hegel, might be an explanation for why they no longer require punishment (§218). Thus, from Hegel’s point of view, what a

crime is in its abstract character is relatively timeless, but those particular acts which constitute crimes are given to change over time; as a result, the relation between crime and punishment can also change (§218R).

Hegel argues that we determine punishment's severity in relation to a crime's perceived "danger to civil society" (§218R).⁸ The more the public is threatened by a crime, the more severe the punishment. One consequence of Hegel's view that crimes are failures of mutual recognition is that perceptions and contexts matter: "a penal code is therefore primarily a product of its time and of the current condition of civil society" (§218R). For example, if a society were engaged in riots or war, then otherwise minor crimes would take on a more threatening character and thus could call for more serious punishment: "in times of war ... various things which are otherwise harmless must be regarded as harmful" (§234A). Because of this, no one form of punishment can uniquely and forever remain "just" for any particular crime; the relation between crime and punishment will change as the contextual climate changes (§218A).

Hegel includes a famous discussion about the problem of poverty. This is a problem because a market economy will necessarily leave some below a level of subsistence (§244). It is often commented that Hegel has no good solution to this problem. For example, he recommends the unsatisfactory goal of encouraging colonization (§248). What is philosophically interesting in Hegel's account is his claim that the root of the problem of poverty is not that persons might lack sufficient wealth, but rather that they lack self-respect and lack a sense that they have a stake in society.⁹ Poverty and this sense of political alienation can often go hand in hand; however, they need not go hand in hand, since alienation can affect even the very wealthy. Hegel's point is that those without sufficient means (or those with great riches) may fall into the danger of viewing society as *an other* – as a place where other people make rules and determine outcomes that appear to be imposed on the individual such that the individual's views, projects and *individuality* are not accounted for. Perhaps there is no ready solution to this problem. But it highlights one instance where Hegel's illuminating perspective can reveal both positive insights regarding our relation to others and also fundamental problems concerning the central importance of mutual recognition. A society in which persons felt that others will not and perhaps even cannot recognize them as citizens is a society that denies justice to all of its members. For Hegel, this failure of recognition is an injustice, but it might be inevitable, even in an ideal conception of the state.

The state

Hegel concludes the *Philosophy of Right* with a discussion of the state and its relation to others in international affairs. Membership in the state is our “highest duty”, in part, because it helps make so much possible (§258). Our family is a sphere of natural love, and civil society is like a family away from home, but the state is a different kind of ethical unity; in the state, citizens have their love of country expressed as patriotism (§268). The state and its constitutional structure “is the actuality of concrete freedom” where our earliest, abstract ideas about freedom are developed and presented in their most concrete lights (§260).

Hegel’s conception of the state is controversial. He claims that the estates composed of agrarian farmers and trade workers provide a check on the powers of the monarch and constitute a form of representation. For Hegel, representation based on geographical location is purely arbitrary. Instead, each person should be represented through his work in civil society; and since only men engage in work within civil society, it follows that only men can be represented in this way within Hegel’s state. The selection of representatives from within our spheres of work allows representation to blossom on the basis of our subjective freedom as expressed through our choice of livelihoods. In addition, it permits the state as a decision-making body to benefit from a wide array of interests and expertise (§273).

The state is headed by a constitutional monarchy (§273R; Brooks 2007). Hegel’s argument for a constitutional monarchy is that the state requires someone to provide unity. For example, who is to say when “the state” confirms a law as its law? The answer, for Hegel, is “the king”, who signs bills into law. The monarchy is a hereditary one, according to Hegel, because this alone enables the monarch to provide the unity that is required. If the monarch were elected, then he would represent the interests of his supporters and perhaps not be seen as a source of unity by those who voted for someone else. So it is essential that the monarchy be hereditary and not based on any election. The monarch works with the universal estate of bureaucrats and selects suitably qualified persons to serve in cabinet roles and to advise the king on legislation and international treaties.

Hegel’s discussion of the state is so interesting, in part, because of what he attempts to achieve through this discussion. For Hegel, philosophers have traditionally had debates over arguments in favour of aristocracy, monarchy or democracy. Hegel’s approach is fascinating and different, because he regularly tries to bring opposing arguments together in new and interesting ways. In his own model of the state,

there is a natural aristocracy which inherits its position (the agrarian estate); there is a democratic element (this is the estate of trade workers who elect representatives); and there is a monarchy (this is the constitutional monarch). So according to Hegel's approach, the crucial debate is not so much over which of the three possible forms of government is best, but rather over how the three different elements in the state (aristocratic, democratic and monarchic) might fit together in the best possible way.

Conclusion

Hegel's political philosophy is highly unique. He develops a political philosophy from within a larger, distinctive philosophical system that understands familiar political concepts in unfamiliar ways. This brief chapter cannot do full justice to the complete range of ideas and arguments presented in Hegel's major contribution to the field, the *Philosophy of Right*. The hope, however, is that this chapter will have provided some insight into the problems that Hegel sought to resolve and into how his political philosophy develops as an account of how human freedom might become more concrete and actual. Hegel's political thought is highly complex, but it will reward in equal measure those who undertake its serious study.

Notes

- 1 Unless clearly indicated otherwise, all references within the text of this chapter will be to *PR* (Hegel 1991a). I will provide the section (§) number and, where appropriate, note Remarks (R) and Additions (A); thus §112R refers to the Remark of section 112 and §112A refers to that section's Addition. Hegel's original text had neither Remarks nor Additions. The Remarks were added in a later edition of the *Philosophy of Right* by Hegel. The Additions are comments attributed to Hegel in his lectures by one of two students.
- 2 Further recommended reading includes Brooks (2013), Houlgate (2005a), Knowles (2002) and Wood (1990).
- 3 The reader finds Hegel constantly commenting on his political philosophy as part of a "science" that operates within a "scientific method" that is "pre-supposed" from earlier work such as the *Science of Logic*. Comments such as these refer to the science and to the scientific method of Hegel's distinctive philosophical project; this project is founded on a particular view of logic and does not rely on any branch of the natural sciences.
- 4 For more on this, readers may wish to consult the relevant sections of Hegel's account of free will (*EnMind* §§481–82), where Hegel first raises the problem of how one can know when free human beings make genuine, non-arbitrary choices; this *leads* Hegel to a consideration (in "Objective Spirit",

ibid.: §§483–551) of how freedom can and should be grounded through mutual recognition. Note that the need for mutual recognition discussed in the *Philosophy of Right* (which expands upon *ibid.*: §§483–551) springs from a problem that arises in a section within Hegel’s system that immediately precedes the section corresponding to the *Philosophy of Right*. In order to understand how we ought to take up Hegel’s thinking about freedom, we must determine precisely where we are within his philosophical system as a whole.

- 5 This perspective is consistent with a “positive” view of freedom according to which freedom is understood as a positive capacity to do or be in certain ways (Green 1993).
- 6 See also Brooks (2013: 52–61) and for discussion on this see Wood (2012: 20).
- 7 This is another interesting example of Hegel’s understanding that “the *less* subjective” is “the *more* objective”, where “the objective” is not an “all-or-nothing” proposition but rather comes in degrees.
- 8 See Brooks (2012c) for an examination of a “unified theory” of punishment, based on Hegel’s analysis and redesigned to address contemporary work in the philosophy of punishment.
- 9 On stake-holding and the idea of a stake-holder society, see Brooks (2012c).

6 Philosophy of nature

Alison Stone

Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* is the middle part of his mature system of philosophy. He published this system in outline form as the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, first in 1817, then, with revisions, in 1827 and 1830. The *Encyclopaedia* has three parts: *Logic*, *Philosophy of Nature* and *Philosophy of Mind*. Hegel produced earlier draft writings on nature in Jena in the 1800s, but his encyclopaedia's *Philosophy of Nature* gives us his mature, definitive view of the natural world.

Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* is the part of his system that has received least attention from Hegel scholars, as well as much criticism from many readers. Some have thought – wrongly – that Hegel was trying to produce his own theory of nature to rival or replace empirical scientific knowledge. Actually, Hegel bases his theory of nature on the empirical science of his own time – science that he assesses, reinterprets and reconstructs. Unfortunately, in the process Hegel sometimes rejects particular scientific hypotheses that have since become well established, such as evolutionary theory; and he sometimes defends hypotheses that have been discredited, such as Goethe's anti-Newtonian account of colour. Moreover, some readers have been sceptical about the merits of Hegel's philosophy of nature because they doubt that philosophers can tell us much of substance about nature. Surely it is for empirical scientists, not philosophers, to inform us about the workings of the natural world.

I shall try in this chapter to address these concerns. But first we need some grasp of the essentials of Hegel's approach to nature. I begin by explaining how Hegel conceives of the relation between philosophy of nature and the empirical sciences. Next, I outline the overall theory of nature which he produces on the basis of his reinterpretations and reconstructions of scientific claims. Finally, I shall offer some reasons for readers today to interest themselves in his theory in light of our imminent environmental crisis.

Some preliminary clarification of what Hegel understands by “nature” is helpful. English-speaking philosophers often distinguish between two senses of nature, following David Hume ([1739] 1978: III.i.ii, 474) and John Stuart Mill (1874: 8–9). In one sense, nature encompasses everything that exists, assuming that all existing things are subject to natural laws and that there are no supernatural agencies (such as the Christian God) or supernatural events (such as miracles). In a second, different sense, nature encompasses everything that is non-artificial: everything that has not been produced, manufactured or transformed by voluntary, intentional human agency. The “nature” that concerns Hegel is close to this second sense of nature (although his overall philosophical outlook differs greatly from those of Hume and Mill). Hegel deals with the human mind and the products of intentional, mindful human activity – including social and political institutions, belief-systems and works of art and culture – in the third volume of his *Encyclopaedia*, the *Philosophy of Mind*. The first volume, the *Logic*, deals with general metaphysical principles and structures (such as becoming, difference and causality) which apply in different concrete forms to the realms of both nature and mind. Thus, “nature” in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature* does not mean “everything” but refers to a particular region of the world: that which is non-artificial and is distinguished from mind and the products of mind.

Philosophy of nature and the empirical sciences

Introducing his philosophy of nature, Hegel writes that “to determine what the Philosophy of Nature is, our best method is to separate it off from the subject-matter with which it is contrasted; ... natural science in general” (*EnNature* 2). What features “separate” philosophy of nature from natural science? He tells us: “Physics and natural history are called empirical sciences *par excellence* and they profess to belong entirely to the sphere of perception and experience and in this way to be opposed to the Philosophy of Nature, i.e. to a knowledge of nature from thought” (*EnNature* 3). Hegel is telling us how physics and natural history, and the natural sciences in general, were widely regarded in his time. They were seen as purely empirical disciplines. That is, their methods were thought to be those of observation and experiment and of gathering, collating and comparing data about what had been observed.

Hegel does not endorse this view. He objects that natural scientific inquiry is *not* purely empirical: it does not remain with the collection of endless observed facts. Rather, he says, scientists draw general

conclusions from their data, generalizing from repeated occurrences to universal laws and classifying phenomena under natural kinds. Hegel therefore says that science involves thought (about universals) as well as observation. “Physics and the Philosophy of Nature ... are not distinguished ... as perception and thought, but only *by the kind and manner of their thought*” (*EnNature* 3). For Hegel, science involves thought insofar as scientists *derive* generalizations *from* observations – presumably by induction and/or inference to the laws that best explain the observed facts.

In saying this, Hegel seems to accept that the scientific method is to make observations, then to generalize from them by induction. However, twentieth-century philosophers of science have argued against this view (see Chalmers [1976] 1999: chs 1–4). Scientists never make pure observations that are not already informed by theory. Rather, scientists set out to make observations that tend to confirm or disconfirm particular theories and hypotheses. These theories inform and guide, all along, how scientists perceive and classify what they observe, how they construct experiments and therefore what observations they obtain.

Elsewhere Hegel agrees that theoretical understanding always precedes observation. In his chapter on “Sense-certainty” in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel argues that sense-perception is always informed by categories of thought (*PS* ch. 1). In his *Philosophy of Nature*, then, Hegel should have said that science involves thought in that theories and theoretical categories always inform the observations that scientists make and the experiments they conduct. Nonetheless (he should have said), science remains empirical because it tests these theories and categories against observations and experimental results.

However exactly we characterize it, it is the *empirical* dimension of science that for Hegel distinguishes science from philosophy of nature. Hegel explains that philosophers of nature start by taking up each “universal” that scientists have already identified and conceptualized. That is, philosophers take up the laws and natural kinds that scientists have identified. Philosophers then reconstruct on rational grounds how each of these “universals” (laws, kinds, forces, etc.) derives from the others and fits together with them into an organized whole. So, Hegel says, in its *origin and formation*, philosophy of nature depends on empirical science, but it then *reconstructs* scientific findings on a new basis. This basis is “the necessity of the Notion” (*EnNature* 6, §246R). (“Notion” is an English translation of Hegel’s term *Begriff*, probably better translated as “concept”.) Hegel elaborates:

The Philosophy of Nature takes up the material which physics has prepared for it empirically, at the point to which physics has brought it and reconstitutes it, so that experience is not its final warrant and base. Physics must therefore work into the hands of philosophy, in order that the latter may translate into the Notion the abstract universal transmitted to it, by showing how this universal, as an intrinsically necessary whole, proceeds from the Notion.

(*EnNature* 10, §246A)

An example may help to explain what Hegel means by saying that philosophers “translate” the universals provided by scientists into “the Notion”, or, more accurately, “the concept”. Hegel begins his *Philosophy of Nature* by discussing space and time. He takes up accounts of space and time given by scientists (including Euclid) and, drawing on these accounts, Hegel tries to show that space and time fit together by tracing how time derives from space. He does this by identifying a contradiction within the structure of space as scientists have understood it. Space is divisible into a manifold of points. As such space is *partes extra partes* – it consists of parts outside other parts. Yet these parts of space have no qualities by which they can be individuated from one another. There is nothing to differentiate these parts from one another and so they prove after all to be identical with each other. Thus, after all, space is pure, distinctionless homogeneity (*EnNature* 28, §254). Space is self-contradictory: it is pure difference *and* pure lack of difference.

For Hegel, time embodies a step towards resolving this contradiction within space. Basing his account of time on that of Aristotle, Hegel maintains that time consists of a series of moments – an unending stream of “nows”, each existing only momentarily. As each “now” momentarily stands out into existence, it divides the past from the future. This makes the “now” akin to a point that divides two parts of a line (Aristotle 1996: 102–03; *EnNature* 33–34, §257). Yet each moment disappears immediately after it has come into existence. It exists so fleetingly that it has no positive existence at all. Hegel concludes that temporal moments are nothing more than a manifestation of negating force, a power to negate the past and future. Once that negation is done, there is nothing more to the moment and it disappears. Nonetheless, in virtue of their negating force, moments differ from one another more fully than spatial points do. For moments at least set themselves *against* everything else, even if only momentarily. For Hegel, then, difference is more firmly realized in temporal moments

than in spatial parts. In this way, time embodies an advance towards resolution of the contradiction within space.

Peculiar as this view of space and time may seem, we can now clarify what method Hegel has followed in constructing it. He has not worked this view of space and time out entirely on his own, through armchair reasoning. Rather, he begins by taking up accounts of space and time given by theoretically inclined natural scientists (Euclid, Aristotle and others). Based on these accounts, Hegel then finds a way to understand time as deriving from space.

In doing this, Hegel is reconstructing how time derives from space on an *a priori* basis. *A priori* knowledge is knowledge that is achieved or justified independently of experience. Hegel's reasoning about how time derives from space is independent of experience in this way. He does not look for any empirical evidence that time derives from space; instead he uses reason to establish this derivation. Although the scientific accounts of space and time on which Hegel draws have an empirical dimension, his rational reconstruction of how time follows from space does not. By reconstructing in this way how each natural form derives from another (as time derives from space), Hegel assembles all these forms into a chain in which each resolves contradictions within the forms that precede it.

As the example of space and time shows, in reconstructing how natural forms derive from one another, Hegel regularly *reinterprets* these forms. He starts from scientific accounts of these forms, but he then modifies those accounts, for instance by reinterpreting temporal moments in terms of negating force. As he puts it, the philosopher "introduces, into these [scientific] categories, other ones and gives them validity ... it preserves the same forms of thought, laws and objects, but at the same time it gives them further formation and reshapes them with further categories" (*EnLogic* 33, §9R).

Hegel also *excludes* some scientific accounts when he cannot integrate the entities with which they deal into his chain of natural forms. Thus, he rejects Newton's account of light and colour in favour of Goethe's because he cannot incorporate Newton's account into his philosophy of nature as he can Goethe's. In such cases, a particular scientific account fails to find any place in the philosophy of nature and so Hegel rejects it as incorrect.

By finding ways in which each natural form derives from the others, the Hegelian philosopher of nature builds up an overall theory of the natural world. In constructing this theory, the philosopher of nature has drawn on scientific accounts, but has then reconstituted and reinterpreted them. Let us now see what actual theory of the natural world Hegel gives us.

Hegel's theory of nature: mechanics, physics and organics

Hegel connects and reinterprets scientific accounts so as to build up a particular conception of the natural world. On this conception, nature is the realm in which matter gradually comes to be shaped and organized by what Hegel calls "the concept". Nature advances in this way through a "series of stages consisting of many moments, the exposition of which constitutes the philosophy of nature" (*EnMind* 13, §381A). What, according to Hegel, are these stages?

In its first stages, nature exists as units of matter with little or no unifying organization to tie them together. Hegel examines these stages in the first part of his *Philosophy of Nature*, the "Mechanics". In this mechanical region of nature, all that exists is "singular individual" entities. They have "the determination" – that is, the defining attribute – of "asunderness or mutual outsideness": *Außereinander*, which literally means being-outside-one-another (*EnNature* 25, §252). This is the realm of matter as bare *partes extra partes*.

At first, these parts-outside-parts exist as space. Here, as we have seen, Hegel believes that spatial parts both differ and fail to differ from one another. Temporal moments also fail, insofar as they only attain differentiated existence for fleeting moments. After space and time, Hegel discusses material bodies, in the subsection "Finite Mechanics". Each material body achieves a level of difference from all other material bodies, by having a particular mass that distinguishes it. This mass is comprised of a particular quantity of spatial parts. So, Hegel writes: "Matter [now] has ... a *quantitative* difference and is particularized into different quanta or *masses*" (*EnNature* 47, §263).

However, Hegel continues, material bodies are still not adequately differentiated from one another. Why not? Because the units of space that bodies possess so as to achieve difference remain self-contradictory entities that are not genuinely different from one another. Bodies, as it were, are attempting to achieve difference by using entities (spatial parts) that are not themselves differentiated, and this cannot work. The contradiction of space instead infects material bodies.

As a result, Hegel claims, these bodies collapse back into identity with one another: "The separated parts ... are only a One [*Eins*], many Ones [*Eins*]; each is what the other is. The One [*Eins*] repels itself only from itself; this is the sublating [i.e. overcoming] of the separation of what is for itself: attraction" (*EnNature* 46, §262A). That is, the tendency of material bodies to collapse together takes the form of their being attracted towards one another. This is how Hegel reinterprets Newton's account of the subjection of material bodies to gravity. Hegel writes:

“Matter possesses gravity in so far as the drive towards a middle point is in it; it is essentially composite and consists of sheer singular parts which all strive for the middle point. ... [it] seeks its unity” (*LPWH* 47–48).

Insofar as material bodies nonetheless have achieved a level of difference – albeit imperfect – these bodies do not simply coalesce but also repel one another. In that bodies are subject to *both* attraction and repulsion, they revolve around a centre into which they strive to, but cannot, unite. This gives us the solar system as a system of bodies organized in motion around their centre the sun, which Hegel discusses in “Absolute Mechanics”, the final subsection of the “Mechanics”.

Hegel now moves on to the second main natural stage, that of “physical nature” (as he calls it). Here nature has the form of material items that are partly, but still only incompletely, integrated together in systematic relations to one another. We have already seen in the solar system a first such case. Here we have material bodies (the planets) integrated into a system by their shared orientation around a centre (the sun). This therefore brings us to the next stage of nature. As this physical stage unfolds, we encounter sets of material items integrated together at increasingly deep levels.

We begin with what Hegel calls “immediate physical qualities” – light and darkness, density and cohesion, sound and heat. What unites these phenomena is that they exist insofar as the mass of material bodies acquires particular qualities (of density, degree of heat, etc.), through which these bodies become more firmly differentiated from one another. Why does this happen? Hegel’s initial thought is that within the solar system, different bodies acquire different qualities because of their places within that system. Location within a system causes bodies to occupy distinct roles within that system and their matter acquires corresponding qualities (for instance, that of pure light in the case of the sun, Hegel maintains). The same applies to material bodies *within* the earth, for by being integrated as a planet the earth is now the system of all the material bodies that comprise it. These bodies, then, begin to acquire distinct qualities too.

Hegel now proceeds to three kinds of relational processes among bodies: magnetism, electricity and chemistry. In all these processes, different bodies are drawn to coalesce together, for they have acquired distinct qualities and yet these qualifications are imposed on the more basic quantities of mass that bodies possess. These differences of mass, as we saw, are unstable and not fully established. To that extent, bodies are still not properly differentiated from one another and they coalesce

together.¹ Once again, however, bodies do not entirely lack difference, so they not only coalesce but also repel one another and regenerate their differences after having combined.

The paradigm of this is the chemical process, in which two substances (two bodies with different qualities) react together (combine) to produce new substances as a result (difference is regenerated). However, this process has an important result. Through it, what emerges is a set of bodies with different qualities, bodies that have assumed these qualities that differentiate them *through* their interaction, their uniting and then separating. The bodies have taken up their different qualities *in relation* to one another. That is, body A has acquired quality B and body C has acquired quality D because A and C have been subjected together to a chemical process within which they have come to occupy different roles. In effect, these bodies are now differentiated by their distinct places within an organized system.

This brings us to the third and final main sphere of nature, that of organic life, described by Hegel in the section “Organic Physics”. According to him, this sphere contains organic beings – plants and animals – the material parts of which are completely pervaded and organized by the forms that unify them. As a result, the material parts of these beings are completely integrated together with one another. Hegel is relying on the hugely influential account of organisms that Kant had given in his *Critique of Judgment* of 1790. Here Kant argues that living organisms must be regarded as having two distinguishing characteristics. First, within any organism all its parts are reciprocally means and ends for one another: each organ functions in ways that enable the others to function, those in turn enabling the first organ as well as one another to function. Second, in enabling each other to exist and operate in this way, the parts belong within an organized system that effectively assigns roles to each of them, so that the whole has organizing power with respect to its parts (see Kant [1790] 1987: 236).

In an organism, then, each part is as it is because of its place within the whole – so Hegel takes it.² Its place completely shapes the part’s character, so that if removed from the whole it would cease to exist:

The single members of the body are what they are only through their unity and in relation to it. So, for instance, a hand that has been hewn from the body is a hand in name only, but not in actual fact, as Aristotle has already remarked.

(*EnLogic* 291, §216A)

Indeed, this means that the parts of a living body are not rightly described as mere parts but as limbs and organs – fully integrated members of an organized system.

Having said this, Hegel believes that only animal organisms fully realize this character of living wholes. The first organic form that he considers is the earth as an integrated totality of magnetically, electrically and chemically interacting constituents. Yet the earth is not alive: it has merely brought us to the very brink of life. The second organic form, plants, are genuinely alive, yet are deficient in that their organs can, if cut from the whole, assume new functions and thereby generate new plants (as when we take cuttings). Thus the organs of a plant are still not so fully governed by the whole as those of an animal. The animal, then, brings the chain of natural progression to its summit and completion.

To sum up: for Hegel, nature has the initial form of matter that is not organized by any unifying form but comprises mere *partes extra partes*. Nature then advances to the form of material bodies that are located in systems of relations to one another, yet that still retain an aspect of bare mass, bare material parts-outside-parts. Finally, nature progresses to the form of the organic body, the material parts of which are completely shaped by their places in the whole. Matter has gone from being unshaped by any form, to being partially shaped by organizing form, to being completely shaped by organic form.

What does Hegel mean by claiming that nature *progresses* through these stages? He interprets nature as a *hierarchy*: its most advanced forms, the organic ones, are the most perfect. This indicates the nature of the progression: the most perfect natural forms are so because they best succeed at resolving the contradictions that (Hegel thinks) obtained in nature in its earliest stages. In turn, those earliest stages are the earliest in the chain of natural progression because they are least perfect: least successful at resolving those same contradictions.

Take space, the very first natural form. As we saw, for Hegel space embodies a contradiction between difference and lack of difference. Time is more advanced – more perfect – than space, since time advances towards resolving this contradiction, in that temporal moments achieve greater difference from one another than spatial parts did. But the improvement made here is small, since temporal moments are only transitory. In the rest of mechanical nature, the parts of matter cohere into material bodies that achieve greater difference from one another by virtue of their distinguishing quantities of mass. Here we see an advance towards resolution of the contradiction from which space initially suffered. The further we advance towards complete

resolution of the contradiction, the more perfect are the kinds of natural form that we get. Nature does not progress temporally, then, but in what Hegel calls a “logical” sense, under which natural forms count as more advanced the less internally contradictory they are. Moreover, the contradictions in question really exist in the natural world, for Hegel. Space as it really exists has antithetical features, so that it is objectively internally contradictory.³

Hegel also regards nature as progressing from pure matter to its final existence as matter fully organized by “the concept”. While “the concept” is also a technical term in Hegel’s logic, in the context of his philosophy of nature he understands “the concept” as follows. This concept is not an idea in the mind; it is something existing, external to our minds, really embodied in the material natural world. It can best be understood with reference to living organisms. As we have seen, for Hegel, the parts of an organism are shaped by the whole and its purposes. For Hegel these are above all the purposes of sensation, irritability (the power to react to external stimulants) and reproduction. The whole and its purposes are not directly material entities, but they shape how the matter of an organism develops. They organize matter and are embodied in it, but they are not material themselves. Insofar as the whole and its purposes are not material, they can be described instead as “conceptual”. In the same way, for Hegel, whatever shapes and organizes a whole set of material items counts as conceptual, or as a concept. Thus as nature advances to forms of matter that are more and more systematically organized and integrated, its matter is becoming more and more pervaded by “the concept”.

Overall, Hegel has crafted a unique theory of nature as the realm in which matter gradually becomes shaped and organized by “the concept”, becoming organic in the process. I have not explained how this theory of nature relates to the scientific accounts of natural phenomena on which Hegel draws. My aim in this section has been to abstract from how Hegel draws on and reinterprets those scientific accounts, so as to highlight the overall theory of nature that results from these reinterpretations. Nonetheless, Hegel did not craft this theory of nature independently of science. It remains a matter for further study how exactly he passes from the scientific findings of his time to his overall theory of nature.

What is living and what is dead in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature*?

How far can anyone today accept Hegel’s actual theory of nature as a hierarchically ordered whole? Only to a limited extent: scientific

understanding of nature has advanced considerably and its content has changed dramatically since Hegel's time. Hegel's theory of nature gives no place to evolution by natural selection, genes, subatomic particles, or many other entities the existence of which scientists now generally accept. Perhaps Hegel's theory of nature could be revised to incorporate these entities. But it is not clear that this revision is worth undertaking. For what remains of interest in Hegel's theory of nature, plausibly, is not its substantial details. Rather, what remains of interest is his overall reinterpretation of what nature essentially is, an interpretation that cuts across all the specific details of his theory.

In Hegel's interpretation, nature is a hierarchical order of forms ranging from most to least contradictory and from the most purely material through to the most organic and conceptually organized. What reasons are there to give serious consideration to this interpretation of nature? Let me note one reason: an environmental one. In our time, environmental crisis is imminent, if not already upon us. The causes of this crisis are complex. But some historians maintain that one causal factor is the new way of thinking about nature that took hold during the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century (see, especially, Merchant 1980). This was the mechanistic view of nature – pioneered by Descartes among others – as a set of units of matter interacting causally with one another. On this view, no natural beings have any real inner purposes or life; even complex forms such as organisms can be reduced to sets of mechanical interactions. This is why, infamously, Descartes found vivisection morally unproblematic: after all, for him, animals are mere mechanisms. As this exemplifies, the mechanistic view of nature has tended to support and fuel human efforts to control interactions within nature for our own benefit. For if natural beings have no real purposes of their own, then we human beings need not disregard or restrict our own needs and purposes for the sake of allowing natural beings to fulfil their purposes: they have none.

The mechanistic assumptions that informed the scientific revolution, then, contributed to making the use of nature for human benefit into an entrenched part of modern life. To be sure, few scientists today would straightforwardly accept a mechanistic view of nature. Yet the use of nature for human purposes, without regard to any purposes that nature itself may have, remains fundamental to industrialized society, which – at least as it has existed so far – depends upon the ruthless exploitation of natural resources.

Hegel challenges the mechanistic view of nature. For him, only the most inferior aspects of nature operate in purely mechanical ways. Living organisms of all kinds are not mere mechanisms; they have their

own guiding purposes. Even chemical, electrical and magnetic processes are not merely mechanical; they already have a level of systematic self-organization that places them mid-way between organism and mechanism. To understand nature properly, Hegel believes, we must recognize that virtually all the concrete natural bodies and processes that surround us have at least some aspects of purposive self-organization. Although Hegel does not say so himself, it surely follows from his views that we ought to *act* towards natural bodies and processes in ways that recognize their self-organizing aspects. For surely (and as Hegel would surely think) we should act towards nature in ways that reflect our best understanding of it.

This is not to say that we should always put the purposes of natural beings above our own. But we should take their purposes *into consideration* in deciding what to do and how to live. In many cases, this will mean finding trade-offs between our own purposes and those of other natural beings. This conclusion – that the purposes of natural beings merit consideration – properly follows from Hegel’s interpretation of nature. The fact that his interpretation generates this useful conclusion gives us reason, if not to accept it wholesale, at least to consider it seriously in the context of the environmental crisis that we face today.

Notes

- 1 Hegel puts this as follows: in this “part of physics ... matter becomes determined by [the] ... *relationship* between ... the spatial determinateness as such and the matter belonging to it” (*EnNature* 124, §290).
- 2 However, for Kant, we must *understand* and approach organisms in this way, but we cannot *know* whether this is their real nature. Hegel drops this restriction on knowledge: for him, organisms really do organize all their parts and we can know this.
- 3 Hegel’s idea that natural entities contain real contradictions is puzzling because it is not clear how something that is internally contradictory can possibly exist. One solution is to interpret Hegel as often speaking of “contradiction” to mean merely tension or conflict.

7 Philosophy of art

Allen Speight

Like many in the post-Kantian age, Hegel saw in art a unique potential for unity. In this chapter, I will discuss the relation between two images of artistic unity that appear to run through Hegel's account of aesthetics: first, the ideal of what Hegel calls the "*interpenetrability*" (*Durchdringung*) of form and content; and second, the ideal of performative human agency, or the *artist as ideal* in his or her activity (*Handlung* or *Tätigkeit*).¹

The relation between these two ideals is highlighted especially in the concise and systematic remarks that Hegel himself (as opposed to his students and editors) made in the eight brief paragraphs on art in his discussion of absolute spirit in the 1830 *Encyclopaedia* (*EnMind* §§556–63).² The first four of these paragraphs are devoted to the "interpenetrability" ideal in a way that shows how it is an answer to the important systematic question of how *nature and spirit* hold together for Hegel – a question at the individual level about Hegel's construal of the unity between body and soul and philosophically between natural and spiritual forms of account-giving. This is the ideal most often associated with Hegel's praise of the classical ideal of beauty within the "religion of art" that characterized ancient Greece, where the gods themselves were rendered sculpturally in human form. The last four paragraphs are devoted to a second essential question of systematic unity for Hegel: the unity of *art and religion* in their *relationship to philosophy* – all considered by Hegel as modes of absolute spirit. To answer this latter question Hegel turns in part to what we might call an *ideal of performative human agency* – a notion crucial for understanding the role that the artist plays in the developing self-consciousness of the absolute over history. As I will argue, the second ideal emerges in the context of a set of inherent difficulties and problems associated with the first and marks particularly the necessary transition which Hegel sees between art and religion.

Art and the unity of nature and spirit: the ideal of “interpenetrability”

Hegel’s systematic description in the *Encyclopaedia* of art’s position within absolute spirit consists of eight typically terse paragraphs (*EnMind* §§556–63). Very little prepares the reader for the role that art is described as playing within this short section: Hegel’s final discussion in the immediately preceding section of the *Encyclopaedia* on “Objective Spirit” ends with an account of the relation of objective (ethical) spirit and *religion*, and the introductory paragraphs of the section on absolute spirit (*EnMind* §§553–55) also seem to be especially concerned with distinctively religious issues (including the role of belief, the cultus and worship, among other topics). Art, in fact, is not mentioned explicitly in the introductory paragraphs of the “Absolute Spirit” section at all.

When art’s position within the hierarchy of absolute spirit is first described (in *EnMind* §556, the first paragraph of the section explicitly devoted to art) it is said to involve two sides, both related to the inherent *finitude* of art. On the one hand, art is said to be the “concrete intuition and representation (*Anschauung und Vorstellung*) of the implicitly (*an sich*) absolute spirit as the Ideal”, something which involves, Hegel says, a *natural* shape that can express the Ideal in a way that “shows it and it alone”. On the other hand, art’s finitude consequently is said to involve directly a breaking-apart (*Zerfallen*) first into the *work*, which has an external existence, and further into the *subject*, which is itself further divided into the roles of *producer* (*das produzierende Subjekt*) and *spectator* (*das anschauende und verehrende Subjekt*). Hegel takes up the first topic – the concrete intuition or representation of the Ideal – in *EnMind* §§556–59 and then shifts to the second – particularly the role of the producing subject in fashioning the work of art – starting in *EnMind* §560.

As Hegel makes clear in the initial four paragraphs, the consideration of the Ideal as concretely intuited or represented leads directly to the definition of the shape (*Gestalt*) of beauty (*Schönheit*):

In this ideal, or the concrete shape born of the subjective spirit, its natural immediacy, which is only a sign (*Zeichen*) of the Idea, is so transfigured (*verklärt*) by the informing spirit (*durch den einbildenden Geist*) in order to express the Idea, that the figure (*Gestalt*) shows it and it alone.

Hegel’s definition of beauty captures two important elements. On the one hand, the definition emphasizes a restriction: art is finite and

attached to a natural immediacy which can only be a “sign” of the idea; on the other hand, the natural immediacy involved in art is “transfigured” in such a way that the shape which comes before the spectating subject is *completely* shaped by spirit. Hegel consistently uses the term “interpenetration” (*Durchdringung*) to express simultaneously this completeness of shape as well as its limitation: “Beauty in general goes no further than an interpenetration of the vision or image by the spiritual principle” (*nur zur Durchdringung der Anschauung oder des Bildes durch das Geistige*; *EnMind* §559).

The completion-yet-limitation that such interpenetration involves leads in *EnMind* §§557 and 558 to a discussion of how art figures into the large Hegelian question of the relation of nature and spirit. Art requires not just an external material – *sinnliche Äußerlichkeit* – in general (Hegel extends the notion of art’s “material” here to include “subjective images and ideas” – that is to say, the sort of “embodiment” present in literary works); more specifically, art must also “use the given forms of nature with a significance (*Bedeutung*) which art must divine and possess (*ahnen und innehaben*)”. As *EnMind* §557 notes, this means a “unity of nature *and* spirit”, not the higher unity in which nature is something *aufgehoben* (the latter possibility is one which Hegel explicitly links to the later religious stage in which the embodied and external element associated with the presence of art in the Greek ethos or cultus is replaced by the higher stage of conscience or *Gewissen* – a move heralded by the transition from “classical” to “romantic” forms of art).³

The culmination of this discussion of art’s finitude and embodiment is Hegel’s distinctive claim about the human body: “Of all such forms, the human is the highest and the true (*die höchste und die wahrhafte*), because only in it can the spirit have its corporeity and thus its visible expression” (*EnMind* §558).⁴ This important claim in the context of the brief *Encyclopaedia* remarks about art is echoed numerous times throughout the *Lectures*,⁵ so it is important to see why Hegel attaches such systematic significance to it.

Hegel construes the importance of this bold claim about the importance of the human body within aesthetics in two ways. First, as he says in the immediately following sentence, this claim “disposes of the principle of the *imitation of nature* in art” that had been so central to pre-eighteenth-century aesthetics. Hegel seems to mean that the question of art imitating nature is usually only discussed in an abstract way, rather than in terms of the special aptness of the human body for spiritual and artistic expression – “the characteristic meaningful nature-form which is significant of spirit” (*den Geist bedeutende*,

charakteristische, sinnvolle Naturform; *EnMind* §558). The centrality of the human form within Hegel's aesthetics is thus in part a response to the inadequacy of earlier, imitation-based (mimetic) approaches to aesthetics that he criticizes at length elsewhere in the *Lectures*. On the one hand, taken abstractly, Hegel claims, artistic activity cannot be understood as the "imitation of nature"; on the other hand, there *is* a sense of relevant *mimesis* that Hegel seems to want to preserve from that tradition – at least in reference to the special relationship between spirit and human embodiment.⁶

Even more importantly, however, this claim about the centrality of the human shape makes clear that art is in fact the first part of a distinctive Hegelian answer to the philosophical question about the relation between body and soul: Hegel refers the reader here directly back to the discussion of the "actual soul" in the "Anthropology" section of "Subjective Spirit" in which he describes the body as "*the soul's work of art*" (*das Kunstwerk der Seele*; *EnMind* §411), where various forms of the "identity of interior and exterior" in the soul's subjection of the body are discussed: erect posture, the use of the hand, the mouth's gestures of laughter and weeping and so on.

The explicit connection Hegel draws between these two paragraphs – the discussion of the human form as the highest form which can find artistic expression in *EnMind* §558 and the discussion of the body as a "work of art" for the soul in *EnMind* §411 – represents a significant moment in his larger philosophical treatment of the relation between nature and spirit. In order to see the importance of these connected claims, we will examine first how Hegel uses this general imagery in the context of the aesthetics lectures and then return to the unifying role which Hegel sees art as playing for nature and spirit. The relation between the two paragraphs is made particularly clear in the following ways: (a) in the series of transitions Hegel draws in the aesthetics lectures between the (for him, still limited) forms of natural beauty and the distinctive beauty of art; (b) in Hegel's articulation of the central goal of the "classical" ideal of beauty in the unity of human form and human content; and (c) in the way in which the human form is stressed across the various artistic genres Hegel discusses in his detailed account of artistic forms in the lectures.

Natural beauty and the importance of the human

Given Hegel's official position that the concern of aesthetics should be with *artistic* beauty, the sections on the beauty of nature in the aesthetics lectures are sometimes regarded as some sort of afterthought

on Hegel's part, a concession to a realm of beauty which is inherently limited. But if we consider the systematic connection between the two paragraphs Hegel links in the *Encyclopaedia* account of art, then the account of *why* nature is insufficient as a form of beauty – and the emergence of the natural human form as a subject of artistic rendering – comes to take on a new importance.

The “primary deficiency” in the beauty of nature is a deficiency Hegel articulates in terms of both inadequate content and form: the “soul-life” of an animal, “as what is inner and what gains expression in its outward shape, is poor, abstract and worthless. Further, this inner does not emerge into appearance as *inner*: The living thing in nature does not reveal its soul on itself, for the thing in nature is just this, that its soul remains purely inward, that is, does not express itself as something ideal” (*LFA* I.132). Even animals with the highest form of organization still have external covering and skin which prevents seeing the inner form of organization:

The animal is living only *within* its covering, i.e., this insideness is not itself real in the form of an inner consciousness and therefore this life is not visible over all the animal. Because the inside remains *just* an inside, the outside too appears *only* as an outside and not completely penetrated [*völlig durchdrungen*] in every part by the soul.
(*LFA* I.145–46)

By contrast, Hegel claims, the human skin in its translucence reveals blood vessels that are part of an internal system of circulation: in the human body “there is everywhere and always represented the fact that man is an ensouled and feeling unit. The skin is not hidden by plant-like unliving coverings; the pulsation of the blood shows itself over the entire surface ... ” (*LFA* I.146). Yet despite this difference between animal and human forms, even in actual individual human beings, natural beauty is still deficient: “the poverty of nature equally finds expression on this surface by the non-uniformity of the skin, its indentations, wrinkles, pores, small hairs, little veins, etc.” (*ibid.*).

What is required for the genuine beauty of the ideal is what can be seen in the human eye – which is for Hegel the point of unity in the human being that allows the self to be visible all at once (the eye is the organ in which the “whole soul appears as soul ... for in the eye the soul is concentrated and the soul does not merely see through it but is also seen in it”; *LFA* I.153). In fact, Hegel says, in a somewhat peculiar extension of the metaphor, works of art have a “thousand eyes” that allow revelation of their inner soul (“art makes every one of

its productions into a thousand-eyed Argus, whereby the soul and spirit is seen at every point", *LFA* I.153–54).⁷

The union of human form and human content in the classical ideal of artistic beauty

Hegel's image of the human form as expressive of its inner "at every point" becomes, in fact, the point of departure for his explanation of the classical ideal of artistic beauty as involving a perfect adequacy of form and content. What is required in artistic beauty is the "concentration of the content into the clarity of inherently self-conscious individuality which cannot use for its expression either the mere natural shape, whether inorganic or animal, or personification and the human shape, compounded with the natural one, though badly; on the contrary, it achieves expression in the vitality of the human body that is *completely pervaded by the breath of the spirit*" (in *der Lebendigkeit des vom Geist vollständig durchatmeten menschlichen Leibes*; emphasis added; *LFA* I.441, XIV.30). As Hegel puts it in his account of the emergence of art in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, this means both a soul "dressed" in a particular external shape (*bekleidet, gestaltet*) and an "ensouled" (*beseelte*) body: art's task is thus variously described as one of "liveliness" (the en-souling of bodily form), or of the "revelation" (of the "truth" of nature: i.e. that it is *only* nature and points to spirit), or of the "purification" or "redemption" of nature, and art in this sense "reconveys" (*zurückführt*) the external into the spiritual so that it can be an adequate revelation (*Enthüllung*), thus "casting aside" what does not "belong to the Concept". (Hegel's discussion of portraits is relevant here: what is important, he thinks, is capturing what is "true", but that means capturing what is characteristic of the personality of the portrait subject as a whole rather than every wart or empirical feature of the face.)

Hegel contrasts the ideal of interpenetrability or "highest vitality" (*höchste Lebendigkeit*) with (mere) beauty of form (e.g. a face which is regular in form and beautiful may also be cold and expressionless) and with (mere) grace, charm or exuberance: the "strictness" of style "keeps every form in steady relation to the general meaning which was to be given bodily shape" (*LFA* I.173). His point about the connection between human form and human content that the ideal of interpenetrability requires is not just that art *happens* to represent the human, but that it *must*: "we must maintain that art, once developed to its maturity, must of necessity produce its representations in the form of man's external appearance because only therein does the spirit

acquire its adequate existence in sensuous and natural material” (*LFA* I.434).

What has emerged then is not simply an ideal of the “unity of content and form”: each side is already something which is harmonious, and art is the result of the two: “*each* of the two sides” is “a totality which is the essential nature of the whole”: “only in this way ... is each side *implicitly* identical with the other and therefore their difference is reduced to a difference purely of *form* between two things that are one and the same” (*LFA* I.433). The Ideal, in Hegel’s terminology, means the Idea in determinate form and this implies an adequation of form and content that is not merely the discovery of appropriate artistic form for pre-existing content, but is in fact, as Benjamin Rutter has put it, “a sort of second-order harmony” – that is, the harmony of a harmonious content and a harmonious form, which can be “marred not only by inexpressive or superfluous formal elements ... but by unexpressed content” as well (Rutter 2010: 86; cf. *LFA* I.106).

The role of the human form across the particular artistic genres

One can therefore read Hegel’s aesthetics as a working out of the goal of liveliness or ensouled embodiment across the various artistic genres. If the primary embodiment suggested by this unity can be seen above all in the anthropomorphic statues of the classical gods, the human presence throughout the other artistic forms is also striking. Thus in painting Hegel talks especially about the importance of capturing human flesh tone, in music the importance of the human voice, and drama (where actors on stage are in many ways like “living statues”) where “*the whole man* presents, by reproducing it, the work of art produced by man” and the whole man is thus “fully alive” onstage and “is himself made into an animated work of art”.⁸

Questions about the interpenetrability ideal

A consideration of the ideal of the interpenetrability of human form/content as it emerges from a consideration of the deficiencies of natural beauty and as it comes to shape Hegel’s account of the specific arts allows a new perspective on a number of thorny issues in the aesthetics of Hegel (and German idealism more broadly). One of the most important issues that is illuminated by a consideration of this ideal is the doctrine – common to both Hegel and his fellow idealist Schelling – of the *unity of form and content* in aesthetics. This notion is expressed in different ways by the two idealists, but they both point to

the same phenomenon to explain it: the Greek gods, which are neither (says Schelling) *allegories* (where the particular means the universal) nor schematisms (where the universal means the particular) but – in his sense of the term – *symbols*, where universal and particular are one. A work of art does not mean something *else* but in its classical shape “has for its inner being the free independent meaning, i.e., not a meaning of this or that, but *what means itself* (*das sich selbst Bedeutende*) and therefore *intimates itself* (*sich selber Deutende*)” (LFA I.427).

There are a number of difficulties with this claim concerned with how a work of art can “mean itself” and yet have presumably some wider range of meaning or universal significance.⁹ But the consideration of the human subject as underlying this ideal opens up a useful perspective. As Hegel puts it in discussing the transition from the symbolic to the classical form of art, the only thing which *can* self-refer in this way is the human subject:

For the person is what is significant for himself and is his own self-explanation [*Denn das Subjekt ist das Bedeutende für sich selbst und das sich selbst Erklärende*]. What he feels, reflects, does, accomplishes, his qualities, his actions, his character, are himself; and the whole range of his spiritual and visible appearance has no other meaning but the person who, in this development and unfolding of himself, brings before our contemplation only himself as master over his entire objective world.

(LFA I.313)

Hegel’s consideration here – putatively about the human subject that is represented in divine form in sculptures of the Greek gods – actually leads to something that goes beyond the “sculptural” ideal of interpenetrability: namely the *activity* of the artist “within” his work in a way that goes beyond a specific external shape.

Hegel indicates the importance of this ideal several times throughout the aesthetics lectures and each time uses similar language. It is not just the human *shape* that is uniquely expressive but the range of “human feelings, impulses, deeds, events and actions” that are essential here: the human being *in its activity* (LFA I.435). And this stress marks a shift that we can see in the *Encyclopaedia* consideration of the philosophy of art, since it is the agency of the *artist* which ultimately moves forward Hegel’s argument about art and unity: while the interpenetrability ideal is the topic of the first four of the paragraphs of the *Encyclopaedia* discussion, Hegel emphasizes in the transitional fourth paragraph of the art section of the *Encyclopaedia* that beauty in general

“goes no further than a penetration of the vision or image by the spiritual principle (*nur zur Durchdringung der Anschauung oder des Bildes durch das Geistige*, *EnMind* §559) and the activity of the artist becomes the pivot to the next section. As Hegel puts it in the lectures’ discussion of Dutch painting: “the objects represented and the ordinary man are not an inexhaustible richness, but have their limitations ... But man as a creative artist is a whole world of matter which he filches from nature” (*LFA* I.163, XIII.214). I will turn to this ideal of the artist in the following section.

Art, religion and philosophy: the ideal of the artist as self-conscious agent

As we saw above, Hegel had initially (*EnMind* §556) heralded the discussion of the second artistic ideal as a breaking-apart (*Zerfallen*), to be contrasted with the “interpenetrable” content and form. This second of art’s distinctive moments involved a breaking-apart with three dimensions: the *work*, the subject as *producer* and the subject as *spectator*. It is quite characteristic of Hegel’s approach to aesthetics in general that only the first two – the work of art as something objective and the activity of the productive artist – are really discussed: Hegel’s distance from the Kantian and earlier eighteenth-century emphasis on the role of the aesthetically experiencing subject is here quite clear.¹⁰

Hegel’s discussion in the second half of the *Encyclopaedia* account of the philosophy of art opens up a particular problem about artistic activity and self-awareness and places that within the context of the historical downfall of the “art religion” and the transition from the classical ideal to the romantic ideal, where irony and artistic self-awareness now become important aspects of art. To quote in full the rather complicated passage in which he takes up the artist’s activity:

The one-sidedness of *immediacy* on the part of the Ideal involves the opposite one-sidedness (§556) that it is something *made* by the artist. The subject or agent is the mere technical activity: and the work of art is only then an expression of God, when there is no sign of subjective particularity in it and the net power of the indwelling spirit is conceived and born into the world, without admixture and unspotted from its contingency. But as liberty only goes so far as there is thought, the action inspired with the fullness of this indwelling power, the artist’s *enthusiasm*, is like a foreign force under which he is bound and passive; the artistic *production* has on its part the form of natural immediacy, it belongs to the

genius or particular endowment of the artist – and is at the same time a labour concerned with technical cleverness and mechanical externalities. The work of art therefore is just as much a work due to free option [*Werk der freien Willkür*] and the artist is the master [*Meister*] of the God.

(*EnMind* §560)

If we look carefully at this unusually dense and compact account of artistic activity, Hegel begins his consideration by stressing the importance of what the artist produces or makes – the etymological root of the Greek artist as a “poet” or “maker” (*poiêtês*). But what does the artist gain from a consideration of this side of artistic production? Hegel first seems to emphasize the *lack* of personality or subjectivity involved: what characterizes art in its classical shape, according to Hegel, is that it bears no idiosyncratic signature of the artist himself and the artist’s own sense of discovering a talent or genius – what the Greeks term “enthusiasm”, or literally “in the divine” – would appear to feel very much like being in the grip of an external power. But the conclusion of the paragraph runs in a very different direction – one towards the greater self-consciousness that the artist can encounter in his art: this experience of one’s natural talent or genius at work in fact allows the artist or maker to be aware not only that he is the agent who brings forth the God-in-external-shape (Hegel frequently alludes to Herodotus’s remark that Homer and Hesiod gave the Greeks their gods) but is an agent whose *arbitrary* choices and talents in this production are in fact what is responsible for the shaping of the gods.

This positive valence of the artist’s experience is echoed in Hegel’s next remark, which sets up the general task of the remaining paragraphs of the section on art: the transition from art as a form of absolute spirit to religion as a form of absolute spirit, with the ultimate goal being that “beautiful art ... has its future in true religion” (*EnMind* §563). As in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where comedy and the comic artist are central to the transition from Greek tragedy to the early Christian world, Hegel’s description of the artist’s self-awareness here carries the sense of high self-confidence associated with the moment of comedy:

In work so inspired the reconciliation appears so obvious in its initial stage that it is without more ado accomplished in the subjective self-consciousness, which is thus self-confident and of good cheer, with the depth and without the sense of its antithesis to the absolute essence.

(*EnMind* §561)¹¹

In the light of this transition, the role of the artist appears to be quite crucial for the overall motion within the development of absolute spirit. The claim of philosophy at the end of the treatment of absolute spirit in the *Encyclopaedia* is that “this science [philosophy] is the unity of art and religion” (*EnMind* §572), but Hegel does not offer his reader an especially clear account of *how* that unity is achieved.¹² What we can say about the shift we have examined – from the sculptural ideal of interpenetrability to a consideration of the sculptor *as* ideal – suggests that the artist’s increasing self-awareness is part of what helps push forward the move from art, where the divine has an external shape, to religion, where the divine transcends that shape. Hegel emphasizes the importance of this moment as he devotes the remaining discussion of the *Encyclopaedia* paragraphs on art to the question of why art develops in his view the particular forms of the symbolic, classical and romantic – a development which emphasizes the trajectory of art towards religion (here, the symbolic is the form of art where there is not yet the melding of divine and external shape that we have in the classical, and the romantic is the form of art where the classical has been overcome).

It is interesting in this regard that Hegel’s treatment of the specific artistic genres – architecture, sculpture, painting, music and poetry – is *not* elaborated in the context of the *Encyclopaedia* account of art, despite the wealth of detail that Hegel offers concerning the philosophical significance of their inter-relationships in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Hegel’s systematic emphasis in these paragraphs is thus clear: it is from the perspective of questions of systematic unity – as we have seen, first of that between nature and spirit and second among the forms of absolute spirit – that art’s most lasting philosophical importance can be seen.

Notes

- 1 The term *Durchdringung* runs through the lectures (*LFA* I.95, 115, 146) as do such alternate Hegelian terms as *Durchziehung* (*LFA* I.119) and *Durchbildung* (*LFA* II.955, *W* XV.255). The notion of “completeness” implicit in these terms can also be heard as well as in such Hegelian turns of phrase as the “thoroughgoing possession of soul” (*LFA* I.154) and “the concrete integration of meaning and shape” ([*das*] *konkrete Ineinander von Bedeutung und Gestalt* (*LFA* I.304, *W* XIII.394)).
- 2 The eight short paragraphs on art in the final (1830) edition of the *Encyclopaedia* are Hegel’s most mature and concise articulation of the relation among the forms of absolute spirit (art, religion and philosophy). They also offer a window onto Hegel’s own thought that does not present the textual difficulties inherent in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art*, the standard edition of which was put together by Hegel’s student Hotho and which

must be compared with lecture notes transcribed by students who took the lecture courses. Throughout this chapter I cite from the Wallace & Miller translation of part 3 of the *Encyclopaedia (EnMind)*. For more on the textual issues involved, see the introductions by Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert to her editions of the lecture notes (Gethmann-Siefert 1998; Gethmann-Siefert & Collenberg-Plotnikov 2004).

- 3 In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and elsewhere, Hegel contrasts the ethical world of ancient Greece, where the beautiful ideal of art flourished, with the post-Kantian, Romantic era of his contemporaries: in the former, even figures like Antigone and Socrates who are associated with an opposition to certain reigning social norms do not use the vocabulary of conscience or *Gewissen* to oppose them. While Hegel sees in Socrates a certain proto-notion of conscience (expressed as a sort of “internal oracle”), the notion of *Gewissen* develops later, particularly in the Christian tradition. On the history of the concept, see my “Hegel on Conscience and the History of Moral Philosophy” (Speight 2006).
- 4 Cf. 1823 ms, 218: the human body serves the artist “as an objective foundation”.
- 5 Hegel says that humanity is the “centre and content of true beauty and art” because “the external human form is alone capable of revealing the spiritual in a sensuous way”: artistic beauty in its classical shape thus melds human form (*Gestalt*) and content or meaning (*Gehalt, Bedeutung*) in a way that effects what Hegel calls the “interpenetration” (“*Durchdringung*”) of the two (“*das Menschliche ... [macht] den Mittelpunkt und Inhalt der wahren Schönheit und Kunst aus*”; *W XIV.18, LFA I.432*; “*Diese Gestalt ist wesentlich die menschliche, weil die Äußerlichkeit des Menschen allein befähigt ist, das Geistige in sinnlicher Weise zu offenbaren*”; *W XIV.20, LFA I.433*).
- 6 The critique of the notion of the “imitation of nature” is widely regarded as a significant element in the development of eighteenth-century aesthetics (see Kristeller’s often-cited “The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics”; Kristeller 1951, 1952). There is, however, an important argument for the *persistence* of the tradition of *mimesis* or imitation as central to a philosophical construal of art (see especially Halliwell 2002) and Hegel’s support of at least some *version* of the *mimesis* claim – at least in terms of the human body as such a “characteristic meaningful nature-form” – gives some ground for such a broader appeal to the notion of *mimesis*. In the argument of Hegel’s *Lectures*, the issue is particularly framed in terms of appeals to “given” forms of nature (such as that of the art historian Karl F. von Rumohr, the first volume of whose *Italienische Forschungen* appeared the year before Hegel’s last series of aesthetics lectures, *LFA I.106ff.*) as opposed to “abstract” claims of the ideal (in von Rumohr’s framework, the claims made for sculptural form by Winckelmann, whom Hegel clearly names as having rescued the notion of artistic beauty from simplistic claims of “imitation of nature” *LFA I.63*): Hegel clearly takes Winckelmann’s side in this debate, even though he acknowledges von Rumohr’s concern with the “false and empty abstractions” of derivative (Roman, Hellenistic) art that loses a more “genuine” connection with nature (*LFA I.172*).
- 7 Hegel’s appeal here to the mythological figure of Argus and to a famous distich attributed to Plato (“When thou lookest on the stars, my star, oh!

would I were the heavens and could see thee with a thousand eyes”) is in itself worthy of a commentary: to contrast natural and artistic beauty, Hegel appeals initially not to some external or conceptually articulated standard but rather makes use of artistic imagery in order to describe the notion of artistic beauty he has in mind.

- 8 “*der ganze Mensch das vom Menschen produzierte Kunstwerk reproduzierend darstellt*”; LFA II.627, W XIV.261 (italicizations in the translation are mine); “*der ganze Mensch in voller Lebendigkeit darstellend auftritt und sich selbst zum beseelten Kunstwerke macht*”; LFA II.955, W XV.217. Cf. the lecture notes from 1826: “[in Drama] ist die Kunst in sich zurückgegangen, das Kunstwerk wird von einem Subjekt produziert und auch von einem wirklichen Menschen zur Vorstellung gebracht, so dass ein Mensch die Materie ist, in welcher das Kunstwerk sich zu erkennen gibt” (1826 ms Kehler, 291) and from 1823: “*Hier wird das ganze Subjekt, welches der Rede muss Existenz geben, die ganze Person des Vortragenden in Anspruch genommen*” (1823 ms, 264).
- 9 For a discussion of some of the issues involved with this claim, see Geuss (1983) and Zuckert (2010).
- 10 Like Schelling, Hegel insisted that his series of lectures on art carry the title “Philosophy of Art”. The subject area which the two idealists wished to develop was thus not to be understood in terms of the new discipline called “aesthetics” that had emerged in the eighteenth century and which had come to be identified with the subject’s experience with sensual beauty (although “Aesthetics” is the initial title of the most-used English translation of Hegel’s lectures and Hegel does, however, allow that “aesthetics” can still be used for the subject area, as long as qualifications are made).
- 11 On comedy’s high place within Hegel’s view of art, particularly as it emerges out of tragedy, both in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in the *Aesthetics*, see Shapiro (1986) and Houlgate (2007).
- 12 Hegel’s one sentence on this score in *EnMind* §572 is quite brief and somewhat at odds with things he says later in the aesthetics lectures: “Whereas the vision-method [*äusserliche Anschauungsweise*] of art, external in point of form, is but subjective production and shivers the substantial content into many separate shapes and whereas religion, with its separation into parts, opens it out in mental picture [*Vorstellung*] and mediates what is thus opened out; philosophy not merely keeps them together to make a totality, but even unifies them into the simple spiritual vision and then in that raises them to self-conscious thought.” Contrast this with the claim of the lectures that philosophy unites the two (a) by taking the *objectivity* of art, but without sensuousness and (b) by picking up the *subjectivity* of religion, but purified by thinking (LFA I.104). Similar difficulties – and textual compactness – complicate as well the sorting out of this issue of transition within “Absolute Spirit” from as far back as the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where art and religion are even more (con)fused: see especially Martin Donougho’s discussion of the emergence of artistic performativity in the course of the *PS* section on “The Art Religion”, where Hegel appears to treat the artist’s experience of enthusiasm as a forerunner of the passion of Jesus as god-man (Donougho 2006).

8 Philosophy of religion

Martin De Nys

According to Hegel, reflection on religion is essential for philosophical inquiry, or, as he would say, for the system of philosophy. The basic aim of philosophy is truth. One doing philosophy, therefore, is obliged to reflect on all domains in which truth is or is supposed to be found. Religion is supposed not only to present truth, but to do so in the most fundamental and comprehensive terms. Thus the philosopher must attempt to understand and assess religious claims. Indeed, Hegel writes, “there may be religion without philosophy, but there cannot be philosophy without religion, because philosophy includes religion within it” (*EnLogic* 12). In whatever sense religion conveys comprehensive and fundamental truth, philosophy must exhibit that same truth in its own, philosophical terms.

The task of philosophically understanding the meaning and truth of religious claims is, further, two-sided. It involves reflection on the object of human religious involvement and reflection on the different dimensions of human involvement with what is supposed to be sacred or divine. Hegel elaborates on these ideas in an assessment of the way in which philosophy deals with religion in his day. He observes:

nowadays we merely hear religion talked about but find no investigations into God’s nature or what God might be within himself, how God’s nature must be defined ... Only our relation to God, or religion as such, is an object [of inquiry] for us. Our discussion concerns religion as such and does not, or at least not very much, concern God.

(*LPR* 1: 163)

But, if our inquiry does not concern God very much, then it really cannot concern religion in an adequate and concrete manner. We can only really understand the material and discursive expressions that

religious believers produce, or the ritual and ethical practices in which they engage, if we understand the object and end of those productions and engagements. It is like saying that one can only understand the behaviour of members of football teams on a field if one understands that they are trying either to score a goal or to defend their goal.

However, Hegel also insists that, in doing philosophy of religion, our concern

is not with God as such or as object, but with God *as he is [present] in his community*. It will be obvious that God can be genuinely understood in the mode of his being as *spirit*, by means of which he makes himself into the counterpart of a community and brings about the activity of a community in relation to him. Thus it will be understood that the doctrine of God is to be grasped and taught only as the doctrine of *religion*.

(LPR 1: 116)

These remarks do not contradict the previously noted claim. They present the reverse side of the coin to that claim. People do not believe that God, if God exists and if God's nature is in some sense intelligible, can be understood just as a philosophical abstraction. Rather, religious believers think that God is in the first instance transcendent and mysterious but at the same time accessible, someone to whom they pray and sing and offer worship, in whom they trust and hope, who reveals Godself to them, loves them, chastises them and also saves them. Bloodless abstractions alone do not give us access to God so understood. Philosophers must, first, endeavour to understand God as God is understood from a religious standpoint, that is, through an understanding of the affective, discursive and practical processes through which believing communities and persons take themselves to be involved with God. The inquiry that aims at this understanding leads by itself to a further inquiry concerning how God "might be within himself", concerning God's very nature. Ultimately the first inquiry can come to a conclusion only in the light of the outcome of the second. It may well be the case, and certainly is for Hegel, that an adequate understanding of God's nature requires philosophical categories that appear most abstract when contrasted with the concrete, poetic vivacity of religious discourse. Nonetheless, Hegel's wager is that we come, through those categories, to the truth and in one sense the most basic possible truth, about the God of which religion speaks. The nature of that truth, however, is highly contested, as we shall see below.

Hegel begins his discussion of religious consciousness with comments on the awareness of God that believers enjoy and on the language that gives expression to that awareness. Religious awareness of God begins in “*faith* – i.e. certainty inasmuch as it is *feeling* and exists in feeling” (LPR 1: 386). Faith is a felt certitude that “God is distinct from me, is independent, absolutely in-and-for-himself, and, vis-à-vis myself, this actual being that is in-and-for-itself is at the same time my own, is in my I or self” (*ibid.*). The source of the certainty that belongs to faith is, most basically, the “witness of one’s own spirit, [the witness] that this content conforms to the nature of my spirit and satisfies the needs of my spirit” (LPR 1: 389), that is, the feeling that God responds to the deepest needs of the self. Hegel knows that “every content is capable of being in feeling: religion, right, ethics, crime, passions” (LPR 1: 395). Feeling by itself cannot be the ultimate basis of verification for religious consciousness. Nonetheless, it is in feeling that the content of religion first belongs to the believer; through feeling this “entire genuine content is within our subjective actuality in this enveloped fashion” (LPR 1: 393).

The envelope, however, needs to be opened and its contents set out in view. Hegel discusses this in commenting on what he calls the religious representation. I believe that Hegel’s comments on the religious representation are best understood as a discussion of the nature and functions of religious, as contrasted with philosophical, discourse and will examine those comments from this standpoint. In the first place, then, “sensible forms or configurations belong to representation”, that is, the operators that convey meaning in properly religious discourse are, in the first instance, “*images*” (LPR 1: 397). One must note that the sort of image in question “is something symbolic or allegorical and that we have before us something twofold, first the immediate and then what is meant by it, its inner meaning” (LPR 1: 397–98). Thus the image of God as “father” is not supposed to be understood as literally designating God as a male parent, but as pointing beyond itself to God as one who embraces the self and the human community with powerful, caring love. These sorts of images, because of their basic role in properly religious discourse, endow that discourse itself with a symbolic or metaphorical meaning.

That meaning is expressed not only in discrete images or symbols, but also and more importantly in narratives that incorporate them and allow their formal significance to be determined by them. Some of these narratives, such as the stories of the Greek gods, appeal to our imaginations but have no further importance for us. Others we can find to be of greater consequence. The prime example of such a narrative, for Hegel, is the story of Jesus. Here we have:

something twofold, a divine history. Not only [is there] this outward history, which should only be taken as the ordinary story of a human being, but also it has the divine as its content: a divine happening, a divine deed, an absolutely divine action. This absolutely divine action is the inward, the genuine, the substantial dimension of this history.

(*LPR* 1: 399)

It is this dimension of the narrative that endows it with its essentially religious importance. Because of the contrast between the outward and inward meanings of the story, its significance is also importantly symbolic in form. Moreover:

For ordinary consciousness, for consciousness in its ordinary formation, religion exists essentially in these modes, as a content that primarily presents itself in sensible form, as a series of actions and sensible determinations that follow one another in time and occur side by side in space. The content is empirical, concrete and manifold, its combination residing partly in spatial contiguity and partially in temporal succession. But at the same time this content has its inner aspect – there is spirit within it that acts upon spirit.

(*LPR* 1: 400)

However, religious discourse is not entirely comprised of symbolic images, narratives and other discursive forms that also convey their properly religious significance in symbolic terms. Hegel maintains, “nonsensible configurations also belong to representation” (*LPR* 1: 400). These are not images but rather concepts, as he explicitly notes in this part of his discussion (*LPR* 1: 401). He mentions as examples the notions of creation, of God as such and of predicates assigned to God such as all-wise, wholly good and righteous (*ibid.*). With each of these concepts “we have fixed determinations of content, each of which is simple and independent alongside the others” (*ibid.*). In connection with comments on these “nonsensible configurations”, one should keep two ideas prominently in mind. First, while religious discourse relies importantly on symbols and symbolic articulations such as narratives, it also includes a conceptual dimension. Second, because religious discourse links symbols and symbolic narratives with that conceptual dimension, it genuinely articulates a form of thinking. That is, religious discourse is not simply the product of feeling and imagination. Religious discourse is also an outcome of thought. Religion’s consciousness as representational is, in its own way, genuinely thoughtful. Hegel

reinforces this by noting that, while religious consciousness requires both feeling and representation, a certain primacy belongs to representation. That is because “representation already contains more of the objective – that which constitutes the content or determinacy in feeling. This content is what matters, for it must justify itself on its own account. That it should legitimate itself, or offer itself to cognition as true, therefore falls more on the side of representation” (*LPR* 1: 403).

But while religious discourse genuinely articulates thought, it is still not rational thought in a fully realized form. Hegel suggests this when he speaks of the conceptual elements of religious discourse as “simple and independent alongside the others”. He elaborates further, saying, “to the extent that they are not analyzed internally and their distinctions are not yet posited in the way in which they relate to one another, they belong to [the realm of] representation” (*LPR* 1: 401). One best understands this claim through a specific example. Hegel suggests the doctrine of creation in this regard. With that suggestion in mind, let us suppose that the four following statements are true.

- 1 God exists.
- 2 God is omnipotent and omni-benevolent.
- 3 God created the world out of nothing.
- 4 The world exists.

One can consider each of these statements by itself, with regard to the specific claim that each puts forward. The first simply asserts the existence of God. The second assigns two predicates to God. The third is an assertion about a divine action, that of creating the world and about the nature of that action, that it proceeds from nothing, rather than from a pre-existing material. The fourth asserts the existence of the world. To the extent that one considers these statements in this way, singly and each in isolation from the others, they are “not analyzed internally”, to use Hegel’s words. That is because each of these statements is essentially related to the others and at the same time in a specific way differs from the others. The preceding considerations captured neither the essential relations nor the equally essential modes of differing.

One moves beyond this situation that limits representational thinking through an analysis that makes explicit the distinct differences that these statements indicate and the relations that both integrate and sustain these differences. Thus God’s existence, in our thinking at least, stands over against the properties we attribute to God. But these properties are not in fact separable from God. They coincide with the

infinite being of God. Because God's being coincides with God's omnipotence and omni-benevolence, God both can and does will to create a world out of nothing. The world in turn stands over against God, but cannot be simply separate from its relation to God. Not only is the world created out of nothing, it is nothing in separation from its relation to God. Thus the world, which is distinct from God, exists only insofar as its entire, distinct being is encompassed by the relation with God upon which its existence depends. God in turn is not precisely the cause of the coming into being of the world, although God is that. God is rather the cause of the whole and entire being of the world, which includes the world's coming into being. God, in and through God's relation to the world, is related to Godself. The world, in and through its relation to itself, is related to God.

What has just happened? We began with four statements, apparently independent of each other, joined only by a conjunction: God exists and certain properties determine God and God creates the world from nothing and the world exists. The succeeding analysis makes explicit the nature of the differences between these statements and also shows that those differences can obtain only in the context of specific relations that both integrate the differences into themselves and maintain them as differences. Hegel claims that the outcome of this is a conceptual or philosophical understanding of the statements from which we began that was not possible given just the representational thinking through which we first considered those statements. This outcome understands the nature of the relation between the world and God and simultaneously the differences that distinguish God and the world within the context of that relationship. By specifying (a) the relation that binds the world to God and also (b) the differences that distinguish God and the world, it establishes an understanding of the very being of God and of the world. This accomplishes the second side of the task that philosophy of religion pursues: that of trying to understand God as God "might be within himself".

Why can philosophical or speculative thinking attain a kind of understanding that representational thinking cannot? That is because philosophical comprehension follows only from a most basic and justified determination of concepts or categories such as identity, difference and relation, of the different possible modalities such categories can assume and the relations that obtain between those different possibilities. Only if we have concrete and evidently truthful understandings of identity, difference and so forth, can we then, in a warranted and fully adequate way, go on to comprehend the interrelated differences that distinguish and integrate proposals like those belonging to the four statements

discussed above, a comprehension that uniquely exhibits the meaning and truth of those statements, if they are true. Hegel maintains that a most basic, concrete and justified understanding of categories such as identity and difference can only be the outcome of thinking that is autonomous. This means, minimally, thinking that draws only on resources that it provides to itself and follows processes that it determines for itself. For Hegel, such thinking is fully rational or philosophical thinking. Since only the thinking that determines categories such as identity and difference can adequately operate with those categories, only philosophical thinking can fully exhibit the meaning and truth of proposals initially given in and to representational thinking. Thus only philosophical thinking can in a fully adequate way exhibit the meaning and truth of religious proposals. Religious thought in its specificity is a type of representational thinking. Representational thinking, in its religious form, presents proposals to which interrelated differences belong that need to be understood for a fully adequate comprehension of their sense and truth and at the same time cannot, given its own resources, attain that comprehension. Thus, this form (and all forms) of representational thinking calls for a philosophical re-thinking of its own contents or proposals. In other words, a fully adequate comprehension of the sense and truth of religious proposals is not available to religious thought, properly understood. Religious thought points beyond itself to philosophy for the sake of a fully adequate comprehension of the sense and truth of religious proposals.

The claim just mentioned is open to very different interpretations. This is the basis for the contention one finds regarding Hegel's views concerning religious truth as understood from a philosophical standpoint as contrasted with a religious standpoint. On the one hand, Hegel maintains that specifically religious thought, because it is representational, on its own terms calls for a philosophical re-thinking of its own proposals and he says that "In religion the truth has been revealed as far as its *content* is concerned; but it is another matter for this content to be present in the *form* of the concept, of thinking, of the concept in speculative form" (*LPR* 3: 283). This suggests that philosophy, in putting forward speculative comprehensions of religious proposals, is simply being faithful to the requirements of religious thinking and that speculative comprehensions preserve the content of religious truth and only, albeit significantly, present that truth in a form different from that available to representational thinking. So from a religious standpoint, one should be able to affirm a philosophical articulation of the religious truth that is one's own. However, Hegel also holds that only philosophy can present a fully adequate understanding of the truth belonging to

religious proposals and it does this precisely by re-conceptualizing the content of religious discourse in a way that surpasses its properly religious form. And he says, “even though representation grasps the content in its own forms, the content still belongs to thinking” (*LPR* 3: 286). This suggests that one may, from a religious standpoint, inevitably misunderstand the content or sense of religious proposals and thus also misunderstand whatever truth they convey, since their content “belongs to thinking”, to philosophy, and can only be really understood from a philosophical rather than a religious standpoint. In that case philosophical thinking about religious proposals might legitimately reinterpret religious proposals in other than religiously acceptable terms, by claiming, for example, that the truth of religious proposals has to do with a thoroughly humanistic and immanent understanding of the highest end and good at which human life aims, rather than interpreting this end and good in terms of the relation of human beings to an actually divine and therefore transcendent reality. This gives us a nonreligious construal of the truth of religious proposals, a philosophical articulation of those proposals that one cannot affirm from a religious standpoint.

Very fine scholars, theologians and philosophers are divided with regard to the different possible interpretations of the outcome of Hegel’s philosophy of religion that I have just articulated. For example, Peter Hodgson believes that Hegel presents one of two fundamentally different paradigms that are available to genuinely Christian thought. “Both”, he says, “offer true insight into the reality of God and religion and both have limitations” (Hodgson 2005: 258). But William Desmond finds only limitations: “On the surface Hegel’s thinking saturates us with God, but what it saturates us with, I have come to think, is a ‘God’ who is not God.” Desmond adds, “An idol is no less an idol from being wrought from thought and concepts as from stone or gold or mud” (Desmond 2003: ix). The comments that I offered earlier, briefly indicating the nature of a Hegelian philosophical re-thinking of a representational consciousness of creation, would not of themselves show why one might suppose that the outcome of that re-thinking is an understanding of religious truth antithetical to the way in which that truth is conceived from a religious standpoint. But one can go further. I will mention two steps that might be taken in this direction.

First, one might note that, for Hegel, representational thinking deals with statements taken in isolation from each other and therefore with differentiation, whereas fully rational or philosophical thinking brings about integration. The outcome of integration is some sort of unity. Representational thinking concerning creation, the case previously mentioned, would bring into focus the differences that are supposed to

obtain between God and the world. But, this line of thinking might continue, a philosophical re-thinking of that doctrine, first presented by representational thinking, would further and more fundamentally bring into focus the necessary interrelatedness among the terms that representational thinking differentiates, integrating those terms into a unity to which they belong as moments. In this case, the representational conception of God and the world as differentiated from each other is succeeded and overcome by a more fully rational comprehension of the unity that obtains between the world and God. But then the idea that God is somehow “beyond” the world, the idea of radical divine transcendence that properly religious consciousness requires, is lost. From the philosophical standpoint, one interprets the “truth” of the religious doctrine of creation in a way that one cannot, from the religious standpoint, affirm.

Stephen Crites seems to hold a version of the position I have just outlined. He says, “to transcend the formal limit of the representation is to transcend religion as such” (Crites 1982: 54). I believe, however, that there is a problem with the reasoning I have just outlined. Representational thinking does not bring only differentiation into focus. Representational thinking does and must indicate both differences and interrelations. One cannot, from the standpoint of representational thinking, fully understand that and how both differences and interrelations necessarily obtain among the terms with which one is dealing. But both differences and interrelations are at least given by and to representational thinking. In turn, philosophical thinking does not account for differences by referring them to integrating unities that annul them. Rather, philosophical thinking accounts for differences in terms of interrelations that integrate and unify them and also preserve them as differences. It is quite possible to understand the sketch that I gave earlier of a philosophical re-enactment of the doctrine of creation along these lines. This suggests that transcending representational consciousness through philosophical thinking need not entail a transcendence of the religious standpoint as such.

But a second step in making the case that a Hegelian re-thinking of the religious representation yields a “truth” antithetical to that which one can affirm from the religious standpoint is still possible. This has to do with the most basic categories through which Hegel conceives of God in philosophical terms. I have already cited a text in which Hegel says that the philosopher’s concern

is not with God as such or as object, but with God *as he is [present] in his community*. It will be obvious that God can be genuinely

understood in the mode of his being as *spirit*, by means of which he makes himself into the counterpart of a community and brings about the activity of a community in relation to him.

(*LPR* 1: 116)

This is not the place to carefully examine the notoriously difficult concept of “spirit” in Hegel’s philosophy. Suffice it to say that Robert Williams makes an eminently plausible case in associating Hegel’s conception of spirit with more contemporary discussions of the problem of the self and the Other,¹ and of intersubjectivity. Williams maintains that the Hegelian concept of spirit “is a fundamentally interpersonal and social conception” (R. Williams 1992: 14). He says that absolute spirit, for Hegel, “is not a transcendent metaphysical entity, but rather the very accomplishment of mutual-reciprocal recognition” (*ibid.*), which has intersubjectivity, in either interpersonal or more broadly social terms, as its outcome. Given these views, one may reason, in a way that Williams himself would not at least wholly endorse, as follows. Part of Hegel’s understanding of recognition is that one concretely attains self-knowledge only through recognizing oneself in and being recognized by the Other. Arguably even God can know Godself only by attaining self-knowledge in and through God’s relations with what stands over against God, creatures and specifically human creatures. This by itself seems to deny the traditional theological notion that infinite perfection belongs to God just on account of divine aseity. But further, the idea of God as Spirit dwelling within the human community, which Christianity requires, is, one may argue, rightly interpreted as a representation of the community itself as the intersubjective domain in whose life its members participate, thereby gaining self-knowledge, just as the “self-consciousness” of the community, as it were, resides in the consciousness its members have of themselves as participants in the social whole. If so, then individuals find their “final horizon in the human community”, which entails, in a very specific way, both “the deifying of society” and “the humanizing of God” (M. Westphal 1979: 181).

But again, the reading of Hegel just sketched is not inevitable. Hegel speaks pointedly, as has been seen, about the doctrine of creation. It is quite plausible to say that, if God creates out of nothing everything other than Godself, then God must be uncreated, must exist on account of Godself alone. Hegel speaks of this in referring to God as “absolute substance”, which he takes to mean, ““God is the absolute subsistence, the only true actuality,”” with the consequence that whatever else “subsists has its root and subsistence only in this One” (*LPR* 1: 369). To insist that God is “spirit” is not to annul this position, but

to preserve and subsume it into the subsequent context. In turn, spirit is “*altogether active*. More exactly, it is the activity of *self-manifesting*.” In turn, “‘Manifesting’ signifies ‘becoming for another’” (*LPR* 1: 176). For God to be Self-manifesting is for God to create the human world and to reveal Godself to human beings. If God reveals Godself to human beings, then human beings must both participate in divine self-knowledge and attain consciousness of themselves in the light of their knowledge of God. God, in turn, knows Godself in the context of knowing God’s relation to human beings. At the same time, on account of God’s being as simultaneously absolute self-subsistence and spirit, divine self-knowledge must first come about within Godself, because the being of that which is self-subsistent must be infinite and must coincide with all its perfections, which in turn must be infinite, including the perfection of knowledge and therefore self-knowledge. God must first, as it were, eternally manifest Godself to Godself. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity can be understood as an account of this, although that is not always the case with regard to the various accounts of that doctrine that Hegel presents.

There are problems that the preceding account needs to face.² Nonetheless it stands, I believe, as at least a plausible alternative to the reading of Hegel which requires that a Hegelian re-thinking of properly religious discourse yields a “truth” that one cannot affirm from a religious standpoint. I have introduced elements into the preceding account that belong more obviously to Aquinas than to Hegel. But I believe they are entirely consistent with the substance of Hegel’s argumentation. Given this and recognizing that many would disagree, I believe that there is every reason to hold that a Hegelian re-enactment of religious self-understanding, of what he would call the religious representation, does or at least can yield an outcome that one can affirm from a religious standpoint.

At this point, however, it is important to remember that no philosopher is required to take a foreordained position regarding the truth of religious claims, the nature of religious truth or the nature of the relation and/or difference between religious truth and philosophical truth. The only obligation the philosopher of religion has is to tell the truth about religion, as best one can within the parameters of the issues that frame one’s investigation. Hegel is endeavouring to do just that. In that endeavour, he aims at a truthful understanding of religion that is supposed to have the characteristics that for him belong to all philosophical truth, namely, comprehensiveness and radicality. He tries to understand both the multiple dimensions of human involvements with a reality that is supposed to be sacred and divine and that

reality itself, as it discloses itself in human religious involvements and as it is in itself. Insofar as it is achieved, this understanding would be comprehensive, by addressing and interrelating all sides of the phenomenon of religion, and radical, by going to the roots of what is religiously supposed to matter. Moreover, he claims to show the warrants for the conception of reason that must be justifiable if inquiry is to attain this comprehensiveness and radicality. This is a conception of reason as able to surpass wholly finite standpoints in comprehending the infinite actuality or context that grounds the finite. Hegel's philosophy of religion is very legitimately open to religious, philosophical and theological criticisms. Still, his critics, from both religious and non-religious standpoints, cannot stop occupying themselves with him, which attests to the power of his philosophical achievement. The comprehensiveness and radicality of his philosophical reflections on religion, and the conception of reason whose warrants he claims to present, stand as challenges to our ongoing attempts to understand the truth about religion and more generally to do philosophy, at this point in our history.

Notes

- 1 This term is frequently capitalized in discussions that refer to another self, and the relation of one self to another self.
- 2 I have tried to deal with some of them in De Nys (2009: 153–85).

9 Philosophy of history

Lydia L. Moland

Hegel took the study of history extremely seriously. He seems, to begin with, to have delighted in historical minutiae: his lectures teem with obscure details of Chinese marriage rituals and Persian deities, analyses of Pericles' orations, accounts of the Punic Wars and comparisons of the Goths to the Visigoths. He was also keenly interested in the current events shaping history around him, devoting his energies at the end of his life to analysing the new Reform Bill in England. But Hegel was, in perhaps a new way, a *philosopher* of history, determined to ascertain what history *meant*. The pursuit of this topic led him to some of the most fundamental questions humans can ask about their collective life: how does social change happen? Is there any pattern or trajectory to history? Are humans self-determining, or pawns of greater forces? What role do political entities such as nations or states play in historical development and why?

Hegel's answers to these questions result in some of the most contentious and misunderstood claims in his philosophical theory. These misunderstandings, I will argue in section two, can be mitigated when we better understand Hegel's primary philosophical commitment. He articulates this commitment early in his lectures on the philosophy of history: "The history of the world", he claims, "is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom; a progress that we must acknowledge in its necessity" (*PH* 19).¹ More simply stated, Hegel thinks that world history chronicles humans' increasing understanding of themselves as essentially free. *Philosophical* history, which is what Hegel takes himself to be doing, is unlike other kinds of historical inquiry in that it interprets even minute historical detail – the Chinese marriage rituals, Persian deities and so on – as evidence for how the culture in question understood freedom. Hegel thought that the political revolutions of his generation signalled that this understanding had reached new sophistication. But he also thought freedom's progress

was still under way and that its future was fragile. That fragility, ironically, is mirrored in a range of Hegel's own pronouncements, many of which we would now dismiss as betraying a faulty conception of freedom on Hegel's own part.

Before turning to his theory, a comment on the status of Hegel's texts is in order. Hegel addresses world history in two of his published works: in the *Philosophy of Right* (§§341–60) and in part three of his *Encyclopaedia*, the *Philosophy of Mind* (§§548–52). In both contexts, his comments are brief to the point of being impenetrable. But these published remarks have the significant advantage of indicating that Hegel sees history as a hinge between “objective spirit” and “absolute spirit”. “Objective spirit” describes how the institutions of ethical life (the family, civil society and the state) must be structured in order for humans to be free. “Absolute spirit” chronicles humans' attempts to reflect on and understand their freedom through art, religion and philosophy. Hegel's discussion of history appears in the transition from “objective spirit” to “absolute spirit” and contains elements of both. History is earthbound in the way our actual experiences in the institutions of “objective spirit” are. But making sense of these experiences requires reflection typical of “absolute spirit”. History is not simply a recounting of what happened when, but is also our interpretation of these events. As such, it provides a transition between these two major parts of Hegel's system.

Much of what is commonly known as Hegel's philosophy of history, however, comes not from these published sources but from five lecture series Hegel gave at the University of Berlin. As lecture notes heavily edited after Hegel's death, the resulting texts are susceptible to chronic concerns about whether they accurately convey Hegel's thoughts.² Nevertheless, if consulted with appropriate scepticism, they provide a rich resource. J. Sibree's *The Philosophy of History*, based on Karl Hegel's 1840 edition, is the only English translation that includes Hegel's extensive use of historical detail. The introduction to these lectures has been translated more frequently and from a wider range of original texts.³ In what follows, I will primarily use Sibree's edition to provide a broad trajectory of Hegel's account of history, then turn to the broader interpretive questions mentioned above.

Hegel's account of history

History, we have been told, is the progress of the consciousness of freedom. Hegel then announces that he will trace this development through history, beginning with the knowledge of “Orientals, who

knew only that *One* is free, then that of the Greek and Roman world, which knew that *some* are free and finally, our own knowledge that *all* men as such are free and that *man* is by nature free" (*LPWH* 54).⁴

As a preface to explicating this claim, Hegel first dismisses Africans as an "unhistorical" people. He bases this assertion on missionary accounts of Africans' cannibalism and mutual enslavement, concluding that all Africans have "perfect *contempt* for humanity" and are essentially irredeemable (*PH* 95). Following this breathtaking example of racial stereotyping that contradicts his own professed belief in human freedom, Hegel transitions to the Oriental world by discussing China. The Chinese, Hegel suggests, knew that one person, namely the Emperor, was free. This belief percolated throughout Chinese society, affecting everything from its attitude towards corporal punishment to its emphasis on filial piety. Hegel's greater point is that the belief that only the Emperor was free allowed Chinese civilization to treat everyone except the Emperor as not free: a belief that explains phenomena such as widespread suicide, slavery and infant exposure (*PH* 138). Hegel moves from China to India, deploring India's caste structure as a denial of human freedom, analysing its literature and contrasting Hinduism with Buddhism. The Persians, Hegel's next subject, were the first not to describe duty as determined by natural roles such as filial piety (China) or caste (India) but to imagine the divine as an "abstract good, to which all are equally able to approach and in which all equally may be hallowed" (*PH* 175). Hegel continues to trace the progress of freedom through the Assyrian, Babylonian and Median empires as well as through accounts of the Israelites and the Egyptians. At each stage, Hegel claims to find the consciousness of human freedom advancing dialectically, with empires producing, in their collapse, new and more promising conceptions of that freedom.

The Greeks knew that some humans were free. Hegel depicts the Greeks as being aware of themselves as *individuals*, not just instantiations of natural roles. They also knew their civilization to be their own work: the Greek respects both his gods and the political and moral sphere but knows that he is "the spiritual [being] to which their grandeur and purity are owing. Thus he feels himself calm in contemplating them and not only free in himself, but possessing the consciousness of his freedom" (*PH* 239). From this calm and self-confidence come some of the most beautiful artworks the world has ever known, as well as delight in athletic excellence and extreme sophistication in politics. This wisdom and beauty, however, came at a price that undetermined its very source: Athenians denied freedom to their slaves, ostensibly because direct democracy was so time-consuming that citizens needed

slave labour to perform “the work of daily life” (*PH* 255). Ultimately, Athenians’ sense of themselves as individuals culminated in Socrates’ conscience (*PH* 269). This awareness of right and wrong within oneself, not dictated by communal norms, was a vital step for the development of freedom. But Athenian democracy could not ultimately withstand the challenge conscience posed to the communal good, leaving Athens destabilized and vulnerable to foreign aggressors.

Hegel characterizes the Roman Empire as the third stage of history. Rome institutionalized the Greeks’ limited belief in human freedom by extending Roman citizenship throughout the Empire: Rome was characterized by “political universality on the one hand and the abstract freedom of the individual on the other” (*PH* 279). But, in true dialectical form, Rome’s progress in political universalism and abstract freedom provoked its downfall. Citizens’ “concrete forms” – their particular cultures and religions – were “crushed and incorporated with [the Empire] as a homogeneous and indifferent mass” (*PH* 107). The resulting alienation from culture and emotion infected every level of Roman life: marriages were viewed merely as legal contracts, not based in love; Romans did not participate in their own games but forced defeated enemies and slaves to entertain them (*PH* 286, 294). This estrangement further led to an increase of private interest. Before long, respect for the state no longer held dissenting factions in the “necessary equipoise” (*PH* 307). Civil discord followed, leaving Rome in turn susceptible to invading Germanic tribes.

Before Rome’s fall, however, world history took a decided step forward, according to Hegel, with the advent of Christianity. Although the Greeks imagined gods in the form of humans, Christianity went further, claiming that God had *become* human: “It was then through the Christian religion that the absolute idea of God, in its true conception, attained consciousness. Man, finite when regarded *for himself*, is at yet the same time the image of God and a fountain of infinity *in himself*”. This belief grants humans “an infinite value” (*PH* 333). The Christian world, Hegel then says, is “the world of completion”: in it, humans no longer look to nature or the sublime for their understanding of divinity but think of themselves as reconciled with and containing the divine (*PH* 342). Again, this belief will have explicit social consequences. Hegel claims that “under Christianity slavery is impossible” since man “is contemplated in God” and his “infinite value abolishes, *ipso facto*, all particularity attaching to birth or country” (*PH* 334).

But as the persistence of actual slavery makes clear, the dawning of this realization was not yet its implementation. In the fourth and final stage of history, Christianity arrived in Europe and the development of

its message continued. Hegel calls this stage “*Die germanische Welt*” (“The Germanic World”), a term signifying northern European civilization (had he meant to signify *German* civilization, he would have designated this era “*Die deutsche Welt*”).⁵ Hegel devotes significant energy to explaining why the beginning of this era, instead of enacting Christianity’s liberating promise, was characterized by brutality and atrocity. For one thing, Christianity’s attempt to civilize the passions in early medieval settlements was met with fierce resistance: “Religion comes forward with a challenge to the violence of the passions and rouses them to madness” (*PH* 354). In addition, Christianity did not understand its own truth and the resulting misunderstandings led to more barbarity. Hegel links the doctrine of transubstantiation – the belief that, in communion, the host *actually* turns into Jesus’ body – to the crusaders’ goal of possessing the *actual* site of Jesus’ tomb (*PH* 390). The principle of Christianity rejects the need for holy objects since it locates the divine within humans. But initially Christianity does not live up to its own concept.

A final major advance occurred with the Protestant Reformation. Catholicism, believes Hegel (himself a Protestant, however unorthodox), distorted the message of Christianity by placing itself as a mediator between individuals and God. The Catholic church treated humans like children “and told them that man could not be freed from the torments which his sins had merited by any amendment of his own moral condition, but by outward actions ... performed by command of the ministers of the church” (*PH* 379). In creating this dependence, “a condition [that is] the very reverse of freedom is intruded into the principle of freedom itself” (*PH* 379). Catholicism also described holiness as opposed to daily life and so insisted on chastity, poverty and obedience for its priests (*PH* 380). Hegel, who sometimes defines freedom as “being at home with oneself”, claims that in this renunciation of the everyday, spirit “has lost its freedom and is held in adamant bond to what is alien to itself” (*PH* 413). Catholic practices such as the selling of indulgences for the forgiveness of sins only add to Hegel’s conviction that the Catholic church had perverted Christianity’s true message (*PH* 414).

Luther’s insistence on individual access to God without institutional intercession allowed humans to think of the divine as within them rather than as mediated by the church. This conception of divinity more closely reflects the truth as Hegel sees it, namely that humans are free and equal: “This is the essence of the Reformation: man is in his very nature destined to be free” (*PH* 417). Such freedom implies self-determination: Luther, Hegel says, “triumphantly established the

position that man's eternal destiny must be wrought out *in himself*" (PH 441). Put another way: "Truth with Lutherans is not a finished and completed thing; the subject himself must be imbued with truth, surrendering his particular being in exchange for the substantial truth and making that truth his own" (PH 416). The Reformation's endorsement of self-determination also had consequences for political reform: "political life was now to be consciously regulated by reason. Customary morality [and] traditional usage lost their validity; the various claims insisted upon must prove their legitimacy as based on rational principles" (PH 345). The Reformation introduced the idea that the secular – marriage, work, citizenship – need not be renounced in chastity, poverty and obedience, but could be spiritual as well, viewed as "an embodiment of truth, whereas it had been formerly regarded as evil only" (PH 422). The growth of science, too, allowed humans to be more at home in the world as they "recognized their own reason in the reason which pervades [the universe]" (PH 440).

In the concluding section of the lectures, Hegel brings this overarching analysis of the Reformation to bear on the defining political event of his own generation, namely, the French Revolution.⁶ Hegel was a nineteen-year-old university student when the Bastille was stormed in 1789. Like his contemporaries, he greeted the collapse of the French monarchy with joyful anticipation, convinced that it heralded the beginning of political freedom throughout Europe. As a middle-aged professor, Hegel could still remember this exhilaration: "All thinking beings shared in the jubilation of this epoch", he recalls; "a spiritual enthusiasm thrilled through the world, as if the reconciliation between the divine and the secular was now first accomplished" (PH 447). The fact that the Revolution's thrilling potential transformed into paranoia and terror disillusioned those in Hegel's generation to an extent difficult to overestimate. Hegel, like many of his contemporaries, found himself searching for an explanation as to how a revolution whose goal was freedom had resulted in mass murder.

Hegel found his answer in another inadequate conception of freedom, namely Kant's. Kant's was the culminating philosophy of the Enlightenment: his categorical imperative had defined right action as abstracting "from inclination, impulse and desire", instead advocating "right purely for the sake of right, duty purely for the sake of duty" (PH 442–43). Through this conception of morality, Kant offered humans philosophical liberation from religious superstition and unreflective tradition. Since the Reformation had already taken place in Germany and Protestantism had (on Hegel's view) already burst such fetters, Kant's influence did not incite revolt against the church in the

Protestant world. Since the French had remained Catholic, the influence of the Enlightenment in general and Kant in particular set French society on a collision course with both church and state (*PH* 444). The French lacked the political traditions and civic dispositions necessary to uphold the Revolution's lofty commitment to liberty, equality and fraternity. The political system quickly fell prey to suspicion and abuse. Virtue and terror became the "order of the day": legal formalities were simply abandoned and the regime's punishment was "equally simple: death" (*PH* 450).

Having thus accounted for the most important world-historical event of his age, Hegel concludes with a few comments on the failure of Napoleon's reign and the reinstatement of the French monarchy, a brief analysis of England's Parliamentary system and a discussion of the importance of a Protestant "disposition" to the flourishing of freedom. Hegel aims through his own description of ethical life (the *Sittlichkeit* outlined in the *Philosophy of Right*) to encourage the development of such a disposition by anchoring freedom in the concrete experience of family, work and citizenship. Hegel hoped that this more actualized version of freedom would offer a corrective to the destructive abstraction of Kantian morality. But Hegel did not claim that his theory, or any European theory, would be freedom's final word. Any world-historical nation "is the *dominant* one in world history for this epoch and *only once in history can it have this epoch-making role*" (*PR* §347).⁷ In a terse but suggestive passage, Hegel suggests that European nations will not be the site of freedom's progress forever. America is the "land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the world's history shall reveal itself" (*PH* 86).

Questions raised by Hegel's philosophy of history

With this trajectory of world history as background, we can better address some of the notorious puzzles raised by Hegel's philosophy of history. First among these is Hegel's claim that the Christian world represents the "end of history".⁸ Does Hegel mean to say that the world, or the writing of history, will not continue, or that future events will not count as historical? We can remedy this confusion if we remember again that world history is the progress of the consciousness of freedom. Humans' consciousness of their freedom has moved from including no humans, to one, to some, to all. Logically speaking, no further abstract conceptualization is possible. In Protestant Christianity, "the grand principle of being is realized, consequently the end of days is fully come" (*PH* 342). That the abstract concept of human freedom

has been achieved does not, however, mean that freedom has been made concrete in our institutions and norms. Hegel's continued engagement with the politics of his time and his deploring, for instance, of the crippling poverty caused by emerging capitalism, make clear that he thinks there is much to be done to actualize our belief that all humans are free. In that ongoing struggle, history of course continues. But the conceptual development of history culminated, Hegel thinks, with the relatively recent realization that humans are essentially free.

Hegel has also been much maligned for his description of the role individuals play in historical change. He famously describes "world-historical individuals", men like Caesar and Napoleon, who radically disrupted the political landscape and so "occasioned the accomplishment of that for which the time was ripe" (*PH* 30). Such people sense what is dead in their worlds and act to destroy it, ushering in a new era: they are the "clear-sighted ones; *their* deeds, *their* words are the best of that time" (*ibid.*). Napoleon had, within Hegel's lifetime, dismantled the already defunct Holy Roman Empire and instated a universal code of law, deeds which earned him Hegel's lifelong admiration. (It is worth noting that this admiration put Hegel distinctly at odds with the German nationalism inspired by Napoleon's invasion and occupation of German territories.)⁹ To condemn such people as petty law-breakers is to ignore their historical significance.

Despite his respect for Napoleon, Hegel does not give world-historical figures moral *carte blanche*. He goes out of his way to say that individuals remain morally accountable for their deeds regardless of the long-term effects those deeds have (*PH* 33). Nor does he describe them as simple heroes. He acknowledges that world-historical figures often themselves come to precipitous ruin: "they die early, like Alexander; they are murdered, like Caesar; transported to St. Helena, like Napoleon" (*PH* 31). He recognizes that their deeds also cause the ruin of many others: when we contemplate the "miseries that have overwhelmed the noblest of nations and polities" and that "the finest exemplars of moral virtues" have been sacrificed on the "slaughter-bench" of history, we feel "the profoundest and most hopeless sadness, counterbalanced by no consolatory result" (*PH* 21). Nor are world-historical individuals saints who act with the advance of freedom in mind: they are often motivated more by personal ambition than by any explicit understanding of the progress of freedom. Hegel attributes the fact that the pursuit of personal ambition can lead to historical progress to "the cunning of reason" (*PH* 33): it is as if reason itself implants these less noble motives in order to achieve its goals. Hegel thus acknowledges

the uncomfortable fact that, even when individual actions can only be described as self-interested, in aggregate they sometimes lead to historical progress.

All of this adds up to a slightly sordid impression of historical change. Hegel seems then to contradict himself by concluding that history is a “theodicy”, or a proof that everything that happens is God’s will and so for the best. Reminding ourselves of why Hegel so values the Reformation might help explain what Hegel means. The spiritual kingdom, Hegel says, “is created by man himself; and whatever ideas we may form of the kingdom of God, it must always remain a spiritual kingdom which is realized in man and which man is expected to translate into actuality” (*LPWH* 44). Humans must not look to authority figures for truth but must acknowledge their responsibility for articulating and actualizing the truth. That truth is again what Hegel called the truth of the Reformation, namely that humans are destined to be free. So when Hegel says that “the history of the world ... is this process of development and the realization of spirit – this is the true *Theodicaea*, the justification of God in history”, he intends to turn traditional theodicy on its head (*PH* 457). What makes sense of world history is not some externally imposed divine plan but the development of humans’ understanding of their spiritual essence as free and their knowledge that it is up to them to actualize that freedom. If traditional theodicy offers comfort since whatever happens is part of God’s plan, Hegel’s theodicy suggests that we take consolation in the fact that history, despite its bloodshed, shows humans to be increasingly able to recognize their responsibility for actualizing freedom. It is only when we view history *philosophically* that we can perceive this progress despite the toll on individual lives and the ruin of world-historical figures.

Hegel’s claim that “the nation as a state [*Das Volk als Staat*]” is the “absolute power on earth” (*PR* §331) and his assertion that world history documents the “life of nations” (*LPWH* 28) have also proven a source of confusion. Here attention to Hegel’s differentiation between nations and states is helpful. In his historical lectures, Hegel devotes significant attention to nations, by which he means groups with a distinct culture, history, language and geographical territory. Hegel repeatedly acknowledges the importance of national identity in humans’ experience: in order to be at home in the world, we need to understand ourselves as members of cultural, historical groups. But he does not endorse national traditions as ends in themselves. Hegel says: “In world history our topic can only be nations that form states. For it must be understood that only a nation that has become a state is the realization of freedom” (*PH* 39). This claim becomes clearer when we

remember that Hegel describes, as the final institution of ethical life, what he calls the rational state: a government whose branches foster individuality but also enable individuals to modify their desires for the sake of a greater good. A state is then the institutional apparatus for political decision-making and implementation. A nation as a state combines the cultural richness of the nation with the reflection inherent in the branches of government that comprise a rational state. If a nation has traditions that interfere with its members' freedom, Hegel's hope is that by transitioning to statehood – by instituting, for instance, a constitution, legislative balance of powers, some form of citizen participation – the offending traditions will be reformed or revised.¹⁰

The extent to which a nation as a state promotes freedom determines how it is assessed in world history, or in what Hegel calls the “*world's court of judgment*” (*PR* §340). Hegel thinks an international political body such as a world state would undermine the cultural richness of nations, so he does not think that nation states should be subject to international legal sanction. But he clearly holds out history's chronicling of the progress of freedom as a viewpoint from which the deeds of such states can be assessed. We are permitted, indeed required, to pass ethical judgement on states (including our own) whose practices interfere with their members' freedom.

All this makes clear that Hegel, his reputation to the contrary, does not endorse illiberal nationalism. He does not claim that cultural traditions are of supreme value or should be cherished unreflectively. Nor is he specifically a German nationalist. Hegel indeed thinks that Germans' characteristics allowed them to get right what the French had got wrong. But he is often critical of his fellow Germans, never argues for German cultural superiority, and calls the idea of “Germandom” (*Deutschtum*) “Germandumb” (*Deutschtumm*) (Pinkard 2000: 311). He certainly never advocates German territorial expansion. As onerous and steeped in prejudice as his assessment of other races is, if taken as an evaluation of *actions* such as mutual enslavement and infanticide, his judgements are ethical rather than racial. He is willing to criticize his own society along the same ethical lines, frequently acknowledging that Europeans are extremely prone to disregard each other's freedoms as well. There is a chilling irony in his willingness to deny Africans especially the freedom he claims to be advocating. But to associate Hegel with the nationalism and xenophobia of the next century is to neglect crucial details of his theory and to misconstrue his philosophical project.

Finally, Hegel is sometimes portrayed as claiming that historical progress, even in its details, is inevitable and that all its particulars are

preordained. Hegel certainly believed that the idea of freedom, once it has permeated the consciousness of some, would continue to develop and ultimately inspire social change. The civil rights movements in our own time provide possible examples: America's professed commitment to the freedom of all humans required generations of development before it extended beyond white men. But the pace at which this development happens and the degree of bloodshed it involves are not preordained. We as individuals are responsible for the way freedom advances in our lifetimes. Here again Hegel's stipulation that individuals are morally accountable for their actions regardless of their historical effects is relevant. Historical progress is not steady, linear, predictable or irrevocable. Our responsibility to effect positive change with as much respect for human life as possible is real and should weigh heavily on us.

There is much that seems archaic about Hegel's philosophy of history. His use of racial stereotypes is distressing; his championing of Protestantism seems biased; his optimism about freedom's progress strikes us as naive. But insofar as we consider the great struggles of our time still to be *about* freedom, Hegel's philosophy of history remains relevant. When the world convulses around racial, economic or political injustice, it often does so under a claim Hegel would recognize: that humans are equal and essentially free and that a society that fails to promote and protect that freedom is on the wrong side of history. When we hear of condemnations by the international community of human rights violations, we can be put in mind of Hegel's world court of judgement. When we are told that the consciousness of freedom inspired the Arab Spring, we can think of Hegel's belief that the idea of freedom would continue to provoke historical upheaval. When we consider Martin Luther King's claim that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice", we can be reminded of Hegel's faith that our understanding of freedom would continue to develop. And we can hope, perhaps against hope, that he was right.

Notes

- 1 *PH* refers to J. Sibree's translation of *The Philosophy of History* (Hegel 1991c). Sibree's version is a translation of *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* edited by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Hegel 1986).
- 2 Joseph McCarney, in his excellent introduction to Hegel's philosophy of history, gives a helpful summary of the various editions and debates surrounding them (McCarney 2000: 7–8).

- 3 These editions include *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. L. Rauch (Hegel 1988), *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History – Introduction: Reason in History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Hegel 1975b; hereafter *LPWH*), *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. R. S. Hartman (Hegel 1953). See again McCarney (2000: 221–22) and Wilkins (1974: 17).
- 4 *LPWH* is a translation of *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte* (Hegel 1955).
- 5 On this question, see for instance Avineri (1962).
- 6 For a thorough treatment of this complex topic, see Comay (2011).
- 7 *PR* refers to H. B. Nisbet's translation of *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, edited by Allen W. Wood (Hegel 1991a). Cited by section number.
- 8 This idea was recently made famous in Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*, in which the author argues that Western liberal democracy is the last stage of history in Hegel's sense (Fukuyama 1992). Hegel's serious reservations about both democracy and the individualism associated with liberalism, however, make it unlikely that Hegel would approve of Fukuyama's conclusions.
- 9 For a discussion of Hegel's attitude towards Napoleonic reform, see Pinkard (2000: 307–12).
- 10 I discuss Hegel's views on this subject extensively in Moland (2011).

10 History of philosophy

Jeffrey Reid

Hegel's thoughts on the history of philosophy can be found mainly in the form of posthumously published notes, either his own sparse lecture notes or, more copiously, from the notebooks of the students who attended the courses he taught on the subject at the University of Berlin between 1820 and 1831, just before his death. The outline of some of his ideas on the history of philosophy can also be found in his *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, in the final sections of "Absolute Spirit", where he deals with philosophy itself as the highest human spiritual expression. One might also argue that fundamental ideas for his history of philosophy are anticipated in his earlier *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1806/7), which recounts the epic journey of human thought through time, for it is this journey that provides both the content and the form of Hegel's account of the subject.

Hegel always began his courses, whether on art, religion, states (world history) or the history of philosophy, with introductory lectures. His introductions usually dealt with common misconceptions but also with common-sense intuitions that turn out to be founded, albeit in ways that go far beyond common sense. Above all, he used his introductions to show how the material presented relates to his notion of science (*Wissenschaft*), a term synonymous with his idea of systematic philosophy. I will rely on Hegel's introductory lectures in order to examine how the history of philosophy is related to his idea of science, where "love of wisdom" is meant to have become wisdom itself.¹

The problem is this: if we believe that the history of philosophy must be undertaken before we can apprehend what true philosophy (as science) actually is, then we are left in the strange position of studying the history of an object we do not know. Conversely, we cannot know what philosophy truly is without having first studied its history, without knowing how it got to be what it is. In other words, only the true, accomplished notion of philosophy puts us in a position to

comprehend its history and yet the true notion of philosophy only appears as a result of that history. In fact, this apparent paradox is what makes the history of philosophy special, distinguishing it from other histories. For example, the histories of mathematics, states, art and so on all presuppose the knowledge of their objects. How can we study the history of philosophy without knowing its object? Where do we begin? Well, we begin with the introduction, a rhetorical element that actually introduces *us*, the reader, the student, into the epistemological circle that I have just described.

Although it may be rhetorical, in Hegel, the introduction is not the arbitrary construction of the author. Rather, it is coherent with his overall approach, one that assumes that the truth is already known but that we nonetheless must find it out (again) or demonstrate it. It is a method that echoes Plato's solution to the eristic argument: we must begin with an introduction that presents the truth in a kind of ideal, intuitionist way, one that must subsequently be carried out, developed or demonstrated dialectically, in an argued fashion. Hegel's introduction to the history of philosophy assumes the true conception of its subject matter, philosophy; it presupposes that it has already been arrived at and has attained a culminating point in science, where love of wisdom has actually become wisdom. What is wisdom? To answer this question, the best I can do is refer to the Socratic command: know thyself! For Hegel, as for Socrates (and the Oracle of Delphi), wisdom is ultimately self-knowledge. Philosophy becomes wisdom (science) when it knows itself and it knows itself through the knowledge of its history. In other words, when philosophy recognizes its history as its own and recognizes itself in its history, then it is science. This adds an even deeper dimension to the history of philosophy: by revisiting that history, we are actually involved in the process of science; we participate in philosophy's self-knowledge.

I have just described the end of the history of philosophy, a point where philosophy has recognized itself in its past articulations and sees these as integral to what it is, attaining the wisdom of self-knowledge. This idea of "the end of history" has been much debated, in Hegel studies, in every area where Hegel's method is historical (art, religion, world politics, philosophy) and interpreted in various fashions. Regarding our discussion, hopefully it is enough to state here that, for Hegel, the history of philosophy does indeed end in Hegelian philosophy, which he calls science. This is the end of the philosophical narrative. However, rather than seeing this as typical Germanic folly, one could easily argue that any history implies an end and that this end is nothing other than the point at which the historian chooses to look back and

recount his or her story! In other words, the end of (philosophical) history can be seen as a narrative necessity, providing meaning through the coherency and wholeness of the account. Without such a summing up, without such a sense of achievement, historical accounts, it may be argued, tend to be nothing more than the recounting of an endless series of meaningless, boring events.

The principal interest in the history of philosophy involves the connection between past events and the present stage of philosophical reflection. But what are such philosophical “events”? Who are the protagonists of this history? Hegel calls them “heroes of thought”. By the power of their reason, they have “penetrated into the being of things, of nature, of spirit, of God, providing treasures of thought” for us, students of that history, who will come to recognize ourselves, as philosophers, in that history. The so-called “events” of such a history do not take place in the physical world but rather in thought itself, in the realm of universal concerns. This means that the less attention history of philosophy pays to the personal, particular aspects of the philosopher’s life, the better. What matters is the philosopher’s thought, not his personal idiosyncrasies. The past “acts of thought” that we reflect upon may appear, at first, foreign to us, things of the past, but “in reality, we are what we are through history”. Our awareness of this is what Hegel calls “the possession of self-conscious reason” (Hegel 1997: 211).

This process is not unique to us, in the present, but has taken place in every “present”; that is, every past philosopher has taken the material (of thought) that has been passed on, has re-thought it and made it his/her own. In doing so, past philosophical knowledge has been constantly reworked, transformed, preserved and yet invested with the spirit of those reflecting upon it. Thus, philosophy can be seen to “rise in relation to previous philosophy”, in a way that bespeaks progress. Such progress should not be seen as strictly linear but rather, to use Hegel’s strong metaphor, it is a story that “swells like a river, the farther it gets from its source”, incorporating the philosophical contributions of all those who, in the past, have reflected on “their” history and so invested it with the spirit of their time.

As historians of philosophy, the “events” we have before us are human philosophical systems, produced by human spirit. On another level, however, the history we have before us is that of thought itself, what Hegel calls the idea or the absolute, which becomes real and comes to recognize itself through its own articulations in time. I will return to this absolute dimension below. For now, the Hegelian idea is best comprehended in Neo-Platonic terms, where Plato’s highest form

or idea (the good) becomes immanent in the world, giving rise to the human desire to know its source. In Hegel, the temporal nature of the process is where humanity is involved, through the history of philosophy. As we have seen, however, the end of this history implies an absolute dimension in the wisdom of science.

The dynamic encounter between the absolute aspect of what Hegel calls science, as the whole, fully recognized truth and the temporal immanence of human philosophical endeavour is problematic. The truth, as absolute, must be eternally present. Otherwise, it would not be the truth. However, as such, how can it have a history? What is the relation between the history of the truth and the truth itself? Furthermore, if the truth is the fully developed whole, what is the truth status of its parts, of the “events” that make up the history of philosophy? Are they errors? If so, how can the whole truth be made up of errors? What is the relation between the whole truth and the particular fields of human thought, for example, the sciences and religion? These are the questions Hegel deals with in his introduction to the history of philosophy.

How the history of philosophy is related to the truth

The apparent contradiction between the truth as eternal and history as transitory, changing and therefore untrue, implies that philosophy, as historical, cannot gain its object, truth. This problem appears to be reflected in the history of philosophy itself. Whereas other sciences seem to progress calmly, gradually gaining truth and expanding knowledge, philosophy seems to undergo constant upheaval, where earlier contributions are contradicted and dismissed. Thus, a common idea regarding the history of philosophy is that it is only an accumulation of opposed opinions. Just as world history seems to recount a series of contingent actions, across time, the history of philosophy is seen to recount contingent thoughts (not actions) called opinions. Philosophy becomes a series of senseless follies, or, at best, culturally useful information that can be possessed as helpful erudition. For Hegel, the fact that this tends to be our contemporary view of the matter is a reflection of the current climate of opinion in which we live. Our opinionated world sees itself in the history of philosophy: a vast multitude of opinions, spread out for our choosing.

Hegel's lectures (on art, religion, the state, philosophy) are full of critical asides levelled against a contemporary culture which seems opposed to his own view of science. Such criticism is enough to refute the uninformed view that Hegel saw himself living in a world where his own philosophy, as an “end”, was thoroughly actualized in reality.

I have tried to stress the narrative (or logical) requirements of such a culmination, as inherent in how historical accounts are generally understood. Affirming that the world has actually ended with Hegelian philosophy is another matter entirely.

If the culture of opinion is the climate for beginning a discussion of the history of philosophy, the result will be the finding out of particular, isolated ideas that appear foreign to me because they are not mine. The history of philosophy will simply subject me to a mass of strange opinions. This view runs counter to the essence of that history: the free movement of thought in which I may recognize myself as thinking and free. As historians of philosophy and thus as philosophers, we must follow this past movement, working it out for ourselves, making it truly our own. There are no shortcuts, in spite of the spurious promises of our current culture of opinion.

Common opinion does not recognize the philosophical process and, indeed, the events of the history of philosophy seem to challenge this view. Just as history *per se* can be seen as the thankless rise and fall of individuals and civilizations, the history of philosophy can similarly be seen as an endless, meaningless account of “the dead burying their dead”, a “battlefield covered with the bones of the dead”, where each new philosophy is presented as the right one, consigning others to the graveyard. On this view, each philosopher builds and creates his new system, one that shows all previous attempts to be wrong. However, as Hegel argues in the introduction to his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a system of philosophy that is absolutely true cannot leave anything out; otherwise it would not be absolute. Even “error” must be included in such a system. In fact, it is these past “errors” that are historically incorporated into the holistic view of philosophy that Hegel calls science. Consequently, the history of philosophy is integral to the truth. If indeed “the truth is one”, it is because the systematic one incorporates diversity rather than excluding it. The diversity and number of past philosophies do not refute philosophy. Rather, the diversity is its *own* history, through which it is what it is.

This means that the different philosophies of the past are not “a collection of chance events” that are disconnected. Rather, “in the movement of the thinking spirit, there is real connection and what there takes place is rational”. The term “rational” is much misunderstood in Hegel. It does not mean that history (in general) runs on some kind of occult, pre-determining, dialectical program, designed by a transcendent “software” designer. “Rational” describes a relation wherein thought has come to recognize itself in otherness, precisely because it has thought through that otherness. In the case of history,

“rational” means that thought has come to recognize itself in what was initially historical otherness.

Because thought, for Hegel, is characterized by movement, a movement that he calls the concept, history (of philosophy), as rational, will follow the movement of the concept. This movement is not linear and never-ending, but rather can be seen as a development that is circular and deepening, like a spiral, where the endpoint is already pre-conceived intuitively at the beginning. The development between beginning and end must be seen as one of enrichment, of struggle and, above all, as free. To get the point across, Hegel, in his introduction, refers to Aristotle, through the terms of potentiality and actuality and metaphorically to the development of the seed into the actual tree. This development is driven by the final, actual form and yet the final form was already there, at the start, in the potential of the seed. In the present context, the movement of philosophical history is driven by its final form, as science, and yet this destiny must already be present at the beginning, as an intuition of the achieved whole, the wisdom of philosophical self-knowledge. Hegel calls the protagonist of this odyssey “spirit”, a technical term for what I referred to above as “human thought”.

Referring to the metaphor of the tree, we can say that the history of human spirit, recounted in the history of philosophy, is not a system of external, mechanistic necessity but a system carrying out its *own* potential, its *own* necessity, which thus constitutes its freedom. Philosophy is therefore a system in development and that development is its history. Just as the development of the tree may appear as an accidental process, where branches and twigs seem to grow at random, the stages of historical development, when looked back upon, are rational, because it is our thought that is revisiting and reflecting upon the process. The end is the self-knowledge of spirit, which is presupposed as absolute truth, one that must already be eternally there, otherwise it would not be true, in the same way the tree was present in the seed. We must see this voyage of self-discovery as the development of freedom, where freedom is essentially the self-movement of human spirit, realizing itself and recognizing itself through otherness.

In this way, the “errors” of the past become the actual content of philosophical science as a whole. If past philosophies have passed away, it is not because they are wrong, but rather because they are incomplete. Philosophy is only complete, as science, when form is adequate to content, where the form embraces all past forms as its content. In science, all past forms are preserved as present content, affirmatively contained as elements in an organic whole. As preserved, each past philosophy has only surrendered its pretention to be final and absolute.

On the other hand, each past philosophy must be taken as the full expression of its particular “present” within spirit (in the progress of humanity). For example, Cartesian philosophy is the full and adequate expression of a mechanistic view of nature, current at the time of Descartes. However, his philosophy is insufficient to fully explain later organic chemistry. In a way, we can say that the history of philosophy does not deal with the past but with moments that have been *present*. The content of philosophy is always “true” with respect to its moment in time, its moment in spirit and yet is an “error” or incomplete with regards to the whole of science. Consequently, we must not regard the history of philosophy as simply dealing with the past. “In time, it is always true and for every time”, as Hegel remarks. Our project, as historians of philosophy (i.e. as philosophers) is to rediscover the “presence” in the past forms. In doing so, we make those forms “for us” or, to put it another way, we ourselves become present in those past forms. Consequently, reason in history, defined as thought’s recognition of itself in (historical) otherness, implies that the history of philosophy ultimately does not deal with what is gone, but with the living present.

Each philosopher has his place in time. History of philosophy has mainly to do with finding this place or rather the time, the moment in spirit, in the progress of humanity. This method is a sign of maturity. As with individuals, it is a mistake to try to relive one’s youth or one’s childhood. Rather, the mature individual looks back on the different stages of his life, grasps each in its place, while both recognizing himself in these past moments and recognizing this past as constituting the person he has become. This is the process Hegel calls “remembering” (*Erinnerung*). It does not mean yearning nostalgically for past forms because they are “simpler”, more natural and so on. Such nostalgic yearning for simplicity is a sign of escapism and impotence. Hegel is opposed to the romantic idea of the past, presaged by Rousseau, developed in Herder, where history is seen as a kind of falling away or decadence from an original state that was somehow truer and better because it was closer to nature. Against this trend, Hegel maintains that the earliest forms of philosophy are, in fact, the poorest, the most abstract. Conversely, the latest philosophical forms are the most concrete, precisely because they have taken earlier forms into account.

How philosophy is related to the spirit of its time

If we take spirit as the movement of human thought through time and we accept that philosophy is the highest manifestation of thought, then philosophy must have an essential bond with the spirit of its time. We

might then ask how philosophy arises within a given culture, at a certain time. For example, it is usually said that philosophy arises when physical conditions of ease and luxury allow people to think beyond their immediate needs. However, for Hegel, the idea that physical conditions influence spiritual (or mental) manifestations is wrong-headed. In fact, the opposite is true. Because spirit, in general, is the process of thought overcoming, determining and negating nature, it is rather the universe of physical occurrence that is conditioned by philosophy! For example, it is the subjective idealism of Cartesian philosophy that determines its world as mechanical and devoid of spontaneous animation.

Given that philosophy, as the highest articulation of thought, embodies the overcoming of natural life and liberation from natural determination, the consequence is that a culture's philosophy actually manifests itself when its original "robustness of life" is in a state of decline. In fact, philosophy (as thought) brings about the decline! Philosophy shakes up and even destroys status quo reality. Hence, the best philosophy accompanies the downfall of civilizations or, as Hegel puts it elsewhere, the owl of Minerva takes flight at dusk. As examples, Hegel cites Socrates and Plato, whose philosophies arose in the period of Athenian decadence, when Athens was past its prime, its freshness and youthful vitality gone. Roman philosophy (including Roman Stoicism and Epicureanism) similarly appears with the decadence of Rome and the zenith of ancient philosophy appears with the Neo-Platonists at Alexandria. Similarly, modern philosophy (Descartes, Hobbes, *et al.*) occurs with the opposition of Church and State and the fall of the Holy Roman Empire.

How philosophy is distinct from other ways of knowing the truth: freedom

Philosophy is the love of wisdom. In Hegel, wisdom is the self-knowledge of spirit, its absolute truth. However, philosophy is not the only form of human thought that seeks truth. What makes philosophy the highest form of spirit, that which Hegel calls absolute spirit? What guarantees philosophy its absolute status and distinguishes it from the other sciences and from mythology and religion?

Regarding the other sciences, for example the sciences of nature, anthropology, psychology, economics and so on, while they certainly seek the truth within their domains, they lack the essential aspect of freedom that philosophy expresses in its progressive movement. The individual sciences are simply anchored in the consciousness of a

specific time and culture, without being aware of this specificity. Furthermore, they remain empirically attached to their presupposed object (the earth, man, mind, numbers, etc.), confined to studying its finite detail. In opposition to this view, Hegel refers to Spinoza, who affirms that philosophy may deal with finite things but only “as resting in the divine Idea” (Hegel 1997: 266), that is, in the eternal, whole truth that philosophy presupposes in the wisdom towards which it moves.

Given the universal, absolute underpinning of true philosophy, however, we must then inquire into its difference from religion. Given what we have seen regarding the absolute vocation of philosophy as systematic science, we cannot merely exclude religion as that which is opposed to it, for then science would not be absolutely true! In fact, the exclusion of religion reflects the strict Enlightenment view, one which we have largely adopted today, along with an empirical culture similar to the one Hegel attributes to England. The difference between philosophy and religion is far more nuanced in that they both seek to know, in their own ways, the infinite. Nonetheless, from a historical point of view, it is true that philosophy has distinguished itself from religion over time. Indeed, the very conditions for the beginning of philosophy certainly involve opposition to previously existing religion.

In religion, the infinite is experienced as a beyond, as the Other that is reconciled with man through worship. As the immediate recognition of the unity of God and man, worship should be taken as an expression of reason: the self-recognition of thought in otherness. However, in religion, such recognition is expressed as a “representation”, that is, as the image of the human God and the godly human: Christ, the object of an immediate form of knowing called faith, the foundation of worship. Philosophy shares the same goal as religion: reason. However, whereas in religion worship takes place in the form of representations, as doctrines and images, in philosophy the reconciliation of the infinite and the human takes place through the philosophical language of thought itself. It is nonetheless a fundamental mistake to think of religion as devoid of thought.

In their eastern origins, in the Church Fathers, in scholastic philosophy, we find religion and philosophy mixed together. Historically, theology (science of religion) is an expression of this uneasy admixture. Given this ambiguously shared past, the question becomes, to what extent should the history of philosophy take past forms of religious thinking into account? If human self-knowledge, as spirit, can be articulated in religious terms as the knowledge of God, then we see how, for Hegel, the process of spirit itself is, on one level, divine. This is what Hegel means when he remarks that “the active subjective spirit is that which

comprehends the divine and in its comprehension of it is itself the divine spirit” (Hegel 1997: 277).

I am not trying to portray Hegel as promoting religion beyond its station. While religion and philosophy share the same object, that is, the truth or absolute knowing, religion remains anchored in its representations and images while philosophy takes place in the realm of pure, speculative thought. To put it simply, philosophy thinks over religion (and produces philosophy of religion) whereas religion cannot properly think philosophy. “Thinking over” religion allows philosophy to not only recognize it as the penultimate expression of human spirit but also, more importantly, to recognize itself in religion, the same way it must recognize itself in its own history. This is how we come to see that religion is not completely alien to philosophy. Without such acknowledgement, Hegel rightly sees, religion tends to degenerate into fanatical, thoughtless fundamentalism.

Although philosophy recognizes religion as having a shared goal, it is crucial to note that the representative, symbolic nature of religious discourse does not allow it to be historical. The “eternal” aspect in religion is never more than an ever-present revelation. In fact, if religion were itself historical, it would be the free self-movement of thought, that is, it would be philosophy. Consequently, when religion claims a history, it becomes something else: mythology. Hegel must therefore distinguish mythology from philosophy, an increasingly pressing task given the on-going efforts of his old friend (and rival) Schelling, whose work seems to be moving towards a position where philosophy itself is taken as the ultimate, rational form of mythology!

Mythology, for Hegel, reflects only the external aspect of religion and therefore appears to have some sort of historical movement, through epochs, involving different myths: oriental, Greek, Roman, Christian. However, while mythologies may seem to evolve historically, in fact they are always anchored in artistic symbolism, which is essentially non-historical. Indeed, the nature of symbolism means that the religious “Beyond” is always immediately incarnate in the finite expressions of art that mythology employs. By putting aside the mythological, symbolic aspect of religion, we put aside any historical elements it may appear to have and thus remove religion, as knowledge of the absolute, entirely from the history of philosophy. When religion is allowed a history, in Hegel, it always involves art, that is, its external mythological dimension.

The beginning of philosophy and the progress of freedom

We have distinguished philosophy from the other human truth-seeking endeavours, that is, from the sciences, from religion and mythology. In

all of these contexts, philosophy distinguished itself by the freedom of its thinking activity. As we saw, the sciences remain bonded to their specific time and place, unconscious of the metaphysical presuppositions that they are grounded upon. Religion is bound to the representative nature of its accounts, to the rich artistic articulations of its images and stories. Perhaps we can also say that religion is bound to the truth through the immediacy of faith. The essential freedom of philosophy, as the highest (most “divine”) human pursuit, allows us to see how it comes into time and thus becomes historical.

The birth of philosophy must take place at a time when there is human consciousness of freedom through the notions of independent individuality, personhood and political freedom. In other words, philosophical freedom (of thought) must be expressed as practical (i.e. moral and political) freedom. This awakening of human consciousness to (its own) freedom first takes place in the Greek world. It does so, on Hegel’s reading, in opposition to what he calls the “oriental” conception of human moral/political existence. The eastern world is generally portrayed as a type of deterministic substance or nature wherein the finite is seen as purely arbitrary and evanescent. The ontological status of this natural world ensures the meaninglessness of the individual, whose final destiny is nothing other than dissolution into the universal substance. Although this apparent lack of freedom excludes eastern philosophy from the history of philosophy as Hegel conceives it (that is, as the development of human freedom), his lectures, after 1819, do show an increasing interest in what he refers to as oriental thought: Chinese, Egyptian, Indian and Persian philosophy.

In Greek culture, the individual liberates himself from eastern heteronomy, playing out, historically, the famous master–slave struggle that Hegel outlines in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Accordingly, the free Greek subject does not sink into the natural world but rather endures in it, aware of himself as universal to the extent that he knows himself as mind and therefore as free. For to know oneself as mind, as inherently universal, is to be free. Thus the Greek self is no longer a mere “being in nature”; he stands against natural determination and this is the birth of philosophy. Philosophy, as self-conscious mind or spirit, begins in ancient Greece or, to put this more bluntly, “the eastern form must be excluded from the history of philosophy” (Hegel 1997: 301).

However, Greek freedom, as we know, is conditioned by slavery. In other words, as long as some are held in slavery, no one can be truly free. The possibility of true human freedom is only developed in the Christian era, where, for Hegel, modernity begins. Free selfhood does not begin with Descartes but with the idea of the individual as

unconditionally free to choose salvation or damnation, along with the idea that such essential human freedom flows from God's own absolute freedom. Philosophy, as the highest expression of human spirit (and freedom) is therefore divided into two main areas: Greek and modern (which Hegel calls "Teutonic"; see below), corresponding to ancient and modern views of freedom.

The Greek world is divided into three sub-periods, depending on the relation of freedom existing between the self and the world. The pre-Socratics are still concerned with the universality of nature as such. Consequently, they develop principles that hold the ambiguous status of being both natural and spiritual (e.g. fire for Heraclitus). Indeed, originating on the west coast of Ionia, the pre-Socratics are almost "the east".

The second stage of Greek philosophy occurs in Anaxagoras and Socrates, where the self is developed to the point of embracing thought as its universal activity. This recognition of the freedom of thought is almost modern. What is missing from the universality of thought, however, is its deep inner, individual resonance that Christianity will bring. Still, the individual figure of Socrates (like Antigone) cannot help but be seen as a manifestation of modern particular freedom against earlier substantive forms.

In the third stage of Greek philosophy, the awkward, artificial unity between the particular and the universal, embodied in the hybrid nature of Aristotle's system of metaphysical empiricism, breaks down into two opposed, mutually exclusive positions of Roman philosophy: the universality of reason implied by Stoicism and the materialistic particularity of Epicureanism.

This final stage of Greek (i.e. ancient) philosophy involves the resolution of this difference, either through the annihilation of all difference in scepticism or the (re)integration of the particular and the universal in Neo-Platonism, the highest form of Greek philosophy. In Neo-Platonism, we recognize the union of identity and difference. In this way, it pre-figures the highest expression of philosophy itself, the goal and purpose of Hegelian philosophy: absolute knowing or science. We are still lacking, however, the freedom of subjective individuality, made possible in the Christian world.

The duality of Stoicism and Epicureanism is replayed in the modern dichotomy between deterministic reason and faith. This duality, besides producing a new, modern form of scepticism, prefigures the possibility of science: Neo-Platonism reborn but now with individual freedom, *qua* subjectivity. Teutonic (modern) philosophy involves a formative period of opposition (the Middle Ages, where faith and

reason stand absolutely opposed) and what is usually called the modern period. Here, initially, the confrontation between faith and reason takes the form of an opposition between Cartesian selfhood and Baconian empiricism, reconciled in the writings of the German, Neo-Platonic theosopher, Jakob Böhme. The ultimate form of modern (sixteenth- and seventeenth-century) philosophy is neither French nor English but Teutonic!

Of course Hegel's history of philosophy does not end here. The same dilemma that characterized the duality of Stoicism and Epicureanism, that is, the opposition between substance and the subjective demands of individual personality, and which we saw played out on a deeper level in modern philosophy (between empiricism and rationalism), will again restate itself in more recent times. Indeed, the challenge of Hegel's own era restates the same opposition in terms of Enlightenment reason (Spinozistic determinism) and Kantian subjective criticism. Once again, the solution is presented as the reconciliation of these two tendencies, pre-figured in Neo-Platonism and in Jakob Böhme's mysticism: Hegelian science. If this "last" philosophy does not figure in Hegel's own historical account, it is because we are meant to have already become acquainted with it through its history, now our history.

Note

- 1 Hegel's introductory lectures on the history of philosophy can be found in *On Art, Religion, and History of Philosophy: Introductory Lectures*, edited by J. Glenn Gray with an introduction by Tom Rockmore (Hegel 1997: 207–317). These lectures are taken from earlier German editions which synthesized Hegel's notes along with the available student notebook sources to provide a coherent narrative. More recent philological and critical efforts have consisted in separating out these notes, allowing scholars to distinguish between Hegel's own manuscript and sources drawn from his students' lecture notes. See *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, edited by Pierre Garniron and Walter Jaeschke (Hegel 1994). Readers wanting to approach the secondary literature on the subject might begin with Duquette (2002).

Part II

Hegel's legacy

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11 Hegel and Marx

Andrew Buchwalter

The relationship between Hegel and Marx is a highly disputed and complicated one. On the one hand, Marx is presumed to advance a wide-ranging rejection of Hegel and Hegelian thought. Elements of this view are found in the works of Engels, theorists of Soviet Marxism, neo-Marxists influenced by twentieth-century French structuralism and proponents of the analytic Marxism associated with thinkers in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition. This is also a view promoted by Marx himself, who termed his work Hegel's "direct opposite" (*MER* 301). There are many aspects of this view, not all of which are mutually consistent. Generally, though, Marx is assumed to reject Hegel in championing empirical science over metaphysical speculation, materialism over idealism, atheism over Christianity, revolutionary action over contemplative quietism and communism over liberal-monarchical constitutionalism.

Yet as with much in the history of thought, the actual story is more complicated. While Marx does represent a profound challenge to Hegel, that challenge does not involve a wholesale repudiation of Hegel or Hegelian thought. It is better understood as a further development and internal transformation, one that often proceeds on the terrain of Hegelian thought itself. Marx makes this point himself. If occasionally he presents his position as Hegel's direct opposite, elsewhere he proceeds in a more nuanced way, seeking to preserve what is valuable while discarding what is not. As he asserts in the Afterword to the second edition of *Capital*, the point is to extract the rational kernel from the mystical shell of Hegelian thought (*MER* 302). Fully in the Hegelian spirit, Marx's is a "dialectical" encounter with Hegel, negating as it affirms and affirming as it negates.

This chapter examines Marx's "dialectical" reception of Hegel. I focus principally on Marx's own work; owing to space limitations I make only limited reference to the rich and varied tradition of Marxism

after Marx. I consider four central issues: logic, metaphysics and dialectics; normative theory; materialism and political community. In the final section, I raise some questions about the adequacy of Marx's reception.

Logic, metaphysics and dialectics

Central to Marx's position is his critique of Hegel's metaphysics and its speculative conjunction of reason and reality. Yet what troubles Marx is not the conjunction itself, which for him provides the parameters for a theoretical science committed to the comprehensive analysis of existing reality. Here Marx remains supportive of a thinker he praises early on for his "great philosophy, a world philosophy" (*MER* 11). What troubles Marx is the dogmatic and mystified expression that conjunction takes in Hegel's thought. In Hegel's speculative idealism, thought and being are linked through a process wherein reality is generated out of thought itself. Hegel conceives "the real as the product of thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths and unfolding itself out of itself" (*MER* 237). In Marx's de-mystified account, by contrast, theory has a more modest function, one that simply refashions in conceptual form claims and assumptions about an already existing reality. On his view, ideas are "nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into forms of thought" (*MER* 301). Like Hegel, Marx also advances a philosophy of reality that accounts for the proper relationship of thought and being. For him, however, the focus is not on "the reality of logic but the logic of reality" (Marx 1972: 18 amended).

Marx's critique is reflected in his reception of what is arguably the central feature of Hegel's philosophical approach: dialectics. Dialectics is many things for Hegel, but at a basic level it denotes a challenge to presumably fixed states of affairs fuelled through contradictions and their attempted overcoming. Marx is impressed with the account of dialectics formulated by Hegel, "the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner" (*MER* 302). But he also asserts that Hegel's actual deployment of dialectics obscures its proper value. While Hegel initially, in his 1806/7 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, appears to fashion a notion of dialectics based on conflicts and struggles as actually occurring in history, his actual approach is a wholly abstract "dialectic of pure thought" (*MER* 112) focusing on the internal movement of theoretical categories alone. Thus in his political thought Hegel presents an account of political community as emerging from the interplay of concepts like freedom and necessity and not from

the actual struggles of human beings as they come to terms with the conditions of their social life.

The specific point of Marx's critique is reflected in his view of Hegel's mystified account of reality itself. In Marx's reading, Hegel advances a metaphysics of subjectivity that accords living and even self-reflexive powers to logical operations. In so doing, Hegel withdraws reality from actual empirical developments, rendering them the merely phenomenal manifestation of a more basic conceptual reality. In this critique Marx draws on Ludwig Feuerbach's charge that Hegel inverts subject and predicate. Thus, on Hegel's account self-consciousness is not a property of the true subject of social analysis – actual human beings. Instead, Hegel inverts the relationship so that self-consciousness itself is the subject of analysis, while the self-conscious experience of real human beings merely instantiates that category. "To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which under the name of 'the Idea,' he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world and the real world is only the external phenomenon of 'the Idea'" (*MER* 301).

Normative theory

In criticizing Hegel's speculative mystifications, Marx is not directing his animus just at a mistaken view of philosophy or a confused account of social reality. He claims as well that such mystifications are motivated by an odious political function, namely, to defend and justify existing social-political conditions. In particular, he claims, in a criticism seconded by liberals, that Hegel's metaphysics serves to furnish philosophical legitimation for the existing monarchical state of Prussia, for which Hegel, a university professor, was employed as a civil servant. There are many elements to this criticism. Not only is such legitimation entailed by a philosophy committed to the speculative identification of reason and reality, it is also a function of Hegel's metaphysics of subjectivity. Central to that metaphysics is the notion that the principle of autonomous and self-sufficient subjectivity must find particularized instantiation in external reality. On this understanding, then, it is unsurprising that Hegel's political philosophy assigns special standing to the existing monarchy, whose very existence is said to combine the principle of individual personhood with that of sovereign self-determination. Nor in Marx's view does Hegel simply provide a philosophical justification of the status quo; the extent of his conservatism is reflected in a sanctification of the real. Inasmuch as Hegel's metaphysics of subjectivity articulates a conception of spirit

best expressed through the idea of God, its instantiations or “incarnations” – above all in the monarchical subject – themselves assume divine and immutable status.

None of this is to suggest that Hegel, for Marx, is unaware of tensions in existing reality. Marx praises Hegel precisely for an approach that proceeds from existing antagonisms and contradictions: “we recognize his profundity precisely in the way he always begins with and accentuates the antithetical character of the determinate elements” (Marx 1972: 55). Thus Marx commends Hegel for recognizing, as most contemporary political economists did not, the inherently unstable way in which private need and public good, commercial and public interest, are mediated in modern market societies. But he contends that Hegel failed to properly grasp and explain these contradictions. On Marx’s view, contradictions are a necessary feature of modern class-based societies, rooted in private property and private ownership of the means of production. By contrast, Hegel attends not to the contradictions themselves but only to how they contribute to the greater social unity that is the real focus of his practical philosophy. Like political economists such as Adam Smith and Bernard Mandeville, Hegel presents social antagonisms as the phenomenal expression of a more basic harmony, thereby masking the real social disharmony they denote. For Marx, by contrast, harmony belongs to the realm of societal illusion, while antagonisms manifest society’s true essence. It is this confounded, upside-down affirmation of social harmony in the context of a purportedly critical analysis of society that for Marx exemplifies the “false positivism” and “merely apparent criticism” of Hegel’s philosophy of reality (*MER* 118).

The apologetic nature of Hegel’s thought, for Marx, lies not just in its mystifying use of philosophy, but in its commitment to philosophy itself. As a merely reflective activity, philosophy evinces a necessarily passive relationship to existing reality, one that, incapable of effectuating any social change, leaves the real just as it is. Indeed, this assessment seconds Hegel’s own view of philosophy as a retrospective undertaking unable to provide guidance as to how the world should be constructed. Philosophy is what Hegel said it is: the nocturnal owl of Minerva that takes flight only after the shape of reality has already hardened (*PR* 23). Against such contemplativism, Marx champions “revolutionising practice (*praxis*)” (*MER* 144). As he asserts in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, the point is to change rather than to interpret the world (*MER* 145). This is not to say that Marx jettisons theory. Yet theory is not to be understood as with Hegel: a self-contained, self-grounding conceptual enterprise that leaves everything as it is. It is instead a

future-oriented undertaking meant to disclose existing tensions and the tendencies that might effectuate their transformation.

Certainly Marx's departure from Hegel should not be exaggerated. If Marx "overcomes" Hegel's philosophy, he does so, again, in the spirit of Hegelian dialectics itself: through its further development rather than simple negation. Hegel is committed to the unity of reason and reality. For Marx, that unity cannot be properly articulated at a purely conceptual level. It is fully achievable only if reason finds realization in reality, which in turn depends on reality becoming rational for itself. Marx thus advances Hegelianism even as he rejects it. Philosophy is overcome only in its realization, just as it is realized only in its overcoming (*MER* 59).

Materialism

Central to Marx's critique of Hegel is a championing of materialism over idealism. One way this is evidenced, certainly in the early writings, is through a contrasting view of human nature. Whereas Hegel understands human beings above all through reason and self-consciousness, Marx emphasizes corporeality, sentience, physical needs and the passions. Granted, he employs Hegel's concept of externalization in fashioning his own position. In his thought, though, externalization is a materialist rather than idealist notion. It connotes not the self-objectification required of a reflective subject to consolidate a sense of self-identity, but the on-going interchange with the outside world required of a corporeal being dependent on external nature for its existence and survival.

Even here, however, the departure from Hegel should not be exaggerated. The principle of externalization employed by Marx encompasses man's dependence not just on the physical world but also on other persons who, as persons, have "become a need for him" (*MER* 83–84). Proper to the external dependence invoked by Marx are thus elements of the intersubjective sociality articulated by Hegel in his account of reciprocal recognition. Marx's position is informed by a naturalism alien to Hegel's philosophy of spirit, yet it is a naturalism whose full articulation is identical with a "humanism" (*MER* 84) illustrative of Hegel's own view of social relations.

A similar point can be made regarding Marx's concept of man as a "species-being" (*Gattungswesen*). In accentuating species membership, Marx seeks to locate human beings in the natural world. But in defining them specifically as *species-beings*, he ascribes to them a reflexivity that in Hegelian fashion also distinguishes them from other natural

beings. For Marx, human beings are not simply creatures of instinct and natural need. Instead, they can make the conditions of their existence an object of consciousness and will; indeed, they are capable of (re)creating themselves as a species. Marx is not saying that humans are absolutely creative, capable of generating their very existence. As species-beings, they make themselves only as they come to terms with the material conditions of that existence. Still, the naturalism Marx champions against Hegel is not the sort often associated with Feuerbach and many in the Marxist tradition – a deterministic materialism that obtains independently of and in opposition to conscious human agency. Instead, Marx's is a decidedly Hegelian variety, one tied to "human sensuous activity (*praxis*)" (*MER* 143). It is reflective of an "active natural being" that realizes natural needs in conformance with an understanding, individually and collectively, of its creative capacities. Marx's is not a self-objectifying subjectivity but "the subjectivity of *objective* essential powers" (*MER* 115).

Marx's distinctive approach to materialism is also reflected in his conception of history. In many respects this conception is indebted to Hegel. Marx follows Hegel in rejecting the classical notion that reason articulates timeless truths in favour of one attentive to the manner in which thought and experience express historical circumstance. He follows Hegel in promoting a vision of history understood as the progressive realization of freedom. He also claims that the process is a "dialectical" one, fuelled by the emergence and overcoming of contradictions.

Yet Marx's approach to history is distinguished by its decidedly materialist orientation. First, the "subject" of history is not a hypostasized principle of mind but the actions of real human beings as they engage the material conditions of life and the circumstances of their actual existence. Similarly, history is not propelled by the internal development of spirit but by human labour and man's on-going effort to master his material environment. Again, the conflicts that fuel history are not those of ideas but of real groups and individuals as they struggle to come to grips with the material circumstances of their existence.

Finally, for Marx a progressive realization of freedom culminates not in a notion of self-reflexivity articulated above all by philosophy itself, but in a new socio-economic order that supplants the existing capitalist mode of production (accepted by Hegel) with communism and what Marx calls a "socialised humanity" (*MER* 145). In a materialist account the forms of worker exploitation and alienation endemic to an economic system based on private ownership of the means of production and the self-interested pursuit of profit generate contradictions

occasioning the emergence of a system in which decisions concerning the conditions of material life are made by all affected and in which individuals knowingly incorporate into their own pursuit of well-being that of others and the community as a whole.

Marx's approach to history thus differs from Hegel's in significant ways. Yet again the differences should not be exaggerated. If Marx regards human labour rather than spirit as the driving force of history, he still adheres to the Hegelian notion of history as a process of self-creation. Indeed, he takes this view directly from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The "outstanding thing" in the *Phenomenology* is that it presents human self-development as an on-going process in which individuals objectify themselves externally, experience such objectification as a form of alienation and then surmount that alienation once they are able to regard those objectifications as products of their will and consciousness (*MER* 112). Certainly, the concept of self-genesis undergoes significant changes in its materialist reconstruction. At issue, as Marx details in *The German Ideology*, is not a process of internal self-genesis, but one through which the species makes itself in shaping and being shaped by the material conditions upon which it depends for its existence and identity. Still, Hegel is to be credited for presenting, albeit in "abstract, mental" form (*ibid.*), the core insight that history is the process of human beings (re)producing themselves through their labour (even if they do not always do so "just as they please"; *MER* 595).

Similarly, the move from capitalism to communism represents a stage in species self-production inspired by Hegel's notion of the self-actualization of spirit. Not only does communism surmount the *humanly generated* forms of alienation afflicting the species under capitalism; not only does it affirm, in the "return of man to himself", man's nature as a communal being; in establishing humanity itself as the conscious author of the conditions of its social life, it first "creates" man as a genuine species-being – as the subject proper of the history it makes in any case. Communism is "the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution" (*MER* 84).

In later writings on history Marx moves away from the language of alienation, human nature and species self-genesis to a more specifically economic mode of analysis focused on the historical interplay of "the forces and relations of production". Yet this is not to say, as many in the Marxist tradition do, that he thereby renounces an approach inspired by Hegel in favour of one more aligned with the positive sciences. He is certainly not arguing that history is defined by certain invariant laws of development, that the task of social theory is simply

to disclose those laws, or that communism will emerge as the causally determined result of their operation. In these writings as well, Marx remains committed to an approach to history rooted in the Hegelian tradition. In adopting a more explicitly economic mode of analysis, his aim is not to depict unchanging laws of development but to demonstrate – against the “ideologies” of philosophers and political economists alike – that what theorists of market economies present as invariant laws are in fact the historical creations of human beings and that what has historically been created by men can be changed by them as well. As indicated in his account of “the fetishisms of commodities”, Marx’s aim is to show that a mode of production that relegates individuals to mere objects of economic exchange is not a necessary and inalterable fact of social life but simply the function of a historically specific order wherein “a definite social relation between men ... assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things” (*MER* 321). Similarly, economic theory is not simply an account of objective forces but also a practically engaged effort meant to reveal the nature and historicity of capitalist social formations so that societal members might be more empowered to contribute to their transformation. And what propels the transition from capitalism to communism is not the mechanical operation of necessary laws but modes of actions expressed in the transformative and self-transformative activity of self-conscious human agents. Though different in tone and orientation, Marx’s later writings remain within the ambit of Hegel’s thought and even his ontology of spirit, where theoretical presentation of reality proceeds isomorphically with a general account of freedom and self-determination.

Political community

Many of the issues involved in Marx’s reception of Hegel are evident as well in his account of the political community. Marx affirms, against the “atomistic” individualism of the liberal tradition, Hegel’s idea of a polity committed to the “organic” interdependence of individual and community. Yet he claims that Hegel mystified that commitment, focusing not on the political self-determination of societal members generally, but on the conjunction of universal and particular supposedly instantiated in the person of the hereditary monarch. Hegel’s view is problematic, however, not just because it misrepresents the nature of political community, but because, by equating the political with the monarchy, it reaffirms the very opposition between public and private, state and society, that an organic theory of political life must repudiate. True, in his constitutional theory, Hegel does appeal to

political sub-spheres and sub-political associations – estates and corporations – to mediate between public and private life. Yet because these mediating organs proceed from existing public-private oppositions, they merely reaffirm the polarities in question. Indeed, as structures of *mediation*, such bodies attest to the problematic feature of modern political life, for which individuals attain political standing only through *representation* in entities foreign to them. This is all the more so as the intermediaries representing individual interests themselves attain political standing only as those interests are legislatively and governmentally represented by individuals delegated to perform such functions. In this respect, Hegel's conception of corporations and estates, together with his notion of monarchical sovereignty, articulates a system of political representation that Marx, echoing Rousseau, criticizes for separating matters of public concern from "the actual affairs of the people", even while providing the illusion that "truly public affairs are the affair of the people". Hegel is to be praised for recognizing as problematic the separation of civil and political society. "But his error is that he contents himself with the appearance of its dissolution, and passes it off as the real thing" (Marx 1972: 62, 76).

In addressing this issue, Marx importantly does not seek to empower individuals with additional *rights*. While not disputing the value of such *political* emancipation, he charges that mere appeal to rights itself attests to the problem in question. Tied to notions of liberal individualism, "rights-talk" promotes a self-seeking egoism mandating regulatory state structures that reaffirm the separation of political life from the everyday activity of citizens, a circumstance that itself contributes to greater civic privatism (which in turn requires more regulatory structures). The invocation of rights (founded not "upon the relations between man and man, but rather upon the separation of man from man"; *MER* 42) reaffirms the subordination of individuals to the institutional arrangements that the appeal to rights and the liberal view of a polity are supposedly meant to counteract.

For his part, Marx calls for *human* rather than political emancipation. Human emancipation, which he also terms true democracy or communism itself, draws on Hegel's notion of freedom as selfhood in otherness (*Bei-sich-selbst-sein*) and holds that "individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association" (*MER* 197). Yet on Marx's account freedom is not obtained, as with Hegel, via the mediation of institutional structures. It derives instead from a particular view of human nature, according to which individual fulfilment and material well-being directly affirm relations of mutuality and cooperation. "In my individual life I would have directly created your life; in my

individual activity I would have immediately confirmed and realized my true human and social nature” (Marx 1994: 53).

Relying on this account of human nature, Marx purports to surmount the separation of man and citizen, state and society, present as much in Hegel as in liberal political theory itself. Here public life and authority do not denote an abstract power juxtaposed to the ordinary lives of individuals but express instead the activity of individuals in their quotidian life-practice and their everyday social interactions. Conversely, individual self-interest denotes, not privatistic egoism, but a sociality supportive of the well-being of others and community generally. “Human emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work and in his relationships, he has become a *species-being*; and when he has recognized and organized his own powers (*forces propres*) as *social* powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as *political* power” (MER 46).

In his early writings Marx espoused a strongly anarchist notion of political community, one eschewing virtually all forms of institutional authority in favour of a robust conception of radical democracy. Later, however, he articulates a more differentiated position, one that lends support to certain centralized institutional structures, a circumstance distinguishing his position from the philosophical anarchism of Russian revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin. Not only does he call for the “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat” (MER 538) to ensure the transition from capitalism to communism; his conception of a “workers’ state” involves a system of political rule that, against the caprice of market mechanisms, is conceived “to regulate national production upon a common plan” (MER 635).

Yet Marx’s appeal to institutionalized structures also differs from the liberal model (and the bureaucratic state socialism of Soviet Marxism). It is not enough, he argues in *The Civil War in France*, for the working class to “lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes”. Instead, the idea of political rule must be reworked so as to restore “to the social body all the forces hitherto absorbed by the state”. On this view, an account of political representation assigns to delegates a *mandat impératif* – a formal requirement that they advance the explicit will of constituents. Similarly, representatives in a working-class government would be part of a “working” rather than “parliamentary” body, one that is “executive and legislative at the same time” (MER 629–34). Both attest to how Marx, even when allowing for some measure of institutionalized politics, seeks to

surmount the public–private distinctions in Hegel’s political thought while still affirming its organicism.

Hegel’s critique of Marx

In his early writings Marx spoke of the need to settle accounts with Hegel. In the foregoing I have detailed elements of that effort, focusing on his critique of Hegel’s views of logic and metaphysics, normative theory, reality and history and political community. I have sought to show that, throughout, Marx remains within the general parameters of Hegelian thought and that his critique represents, dialectically enough, as much a correction and further development as a repudiation. Yet if in this manner Marx settles accounts with Hegel, how might Hegel settle accounts with Marx? In what remains I note a few ways in which Hegel might respond to Marx’s claimed supersession.

First, one can question Marx’s assessment of Hegel’s philosophical idealism. On Marx’s view, Hegel’s is a *generative* idealism that in mystical and mystifying fashion constructs reality out of thought itself. But Hegel’s position may more properly be construed as a *reconstructive* idealism, one that – not unlike the method proffered by Marx himself – reworks and restates in rational form assumptions and claims about existing reality. True, Hegel relies heavily on the machinery of his philosophical logic for this purpose, yet he does so not to generate reality but to facilitate – with arguably greater methodological self-reflexivity than Marx – the reconstructive process itself. And while Hegel does seek to account for the objectivity of the real, here, too, his aim is not to construct reality but to account for the real in a way that is theoretically both rational and comprehensive.

Second, proper appreciation of Hegel’s logical theory also permits a better understanding of his normative theory. Marx faults Hegel’s speculative identity philosophy for its apologetic approach to existing reality. Nor is there little doubt that on various counts Hegel did seem to voice a rather accommodating attitude vis-à-vis the status quo. Yet it is questionable if the conservative tendencies in Hegel’s practical philosophy are attributable, as Marx claims, to the philosophical theory itself. Understood as a reconstructive undertaking, Hegel’s identity philosophy can be viewed instead as furnishing the basis for a proto-Marxian notion of immanent criticism committed to assessing reality from the perspective of its own claims and aspirations. For Hegel, the general equivalence of thought and being is a means to determine how and whether objects do or do not conform to their own concept. Nor is critique conceived by Hegel simply as a theoretical

exercise performed on a given reality by an external observer. Like Marx's, Hegel's "critical theory" attends to processes inherent in reality itself – something entailed by his notion of reason as spirit, understood as the conjunction of substance and subjectivity. On this account, reality is deemed adequate to its concept only when it can be said to know itself as rational. Appreciation of this point also clarifies Hegel's view of the relationship between theory and practice. It may be true that for Hegel *philosophy* always comes on the scene too late to rejuvenate a world grown old, but that is not to say that the world cannot be rejuvenated or that philosophy cannot play an indirectly educative role in that process. It is only to say any explicit renewal must come from reality itself.

Nothing here denies the differences between Hegel and Marx. While for both critical social analysis is linked to processes by which historical agents acquire greater consciousness of freedom, for Hegel the underlying principle of autonomous subjectivity remains more a reconstructive norm, whereas for Marx it references – in "the proletarian movement" (*MER* 482) – an empirically present phenomenon. Similarly, whereas for Hegel such realized self-consciousness is reflected in a reanimation of existing conditions, for Marx it lies in their revolutionary transformation. Hegel's normative approach, while including a critical dimension, is thus more modest than Marx's. Whether that modesty is a weakness, however, is a matter of debate.

Third, related questions arise regarding Marx's materialist reformation of Hegel's notion of the self-genesis of spirit. It can be asked, for instance, if Marx does justice to Hegel in imputing to his view of history a hypostasized metaphysical subject that denies human agency while mystifying social realities. It can also be asked if Marx's approach, its greater appreciation of material realities notwithstanding, may in places forfeit advantages attached to Hegel's approach. For instance, is the move from a theory of the self-genesis of spirit to one focused on self-genesis through labour the unquestioned advance that Marx assumes? Central to Hegel's model of self-conscious spirit are resources committed to the reflexive examination not only of the objective expressions of human self-activity but also the processes through which individuals scrutinize the modes of their collective self-activity – certainly a desideratum for a comprehensive account of human self-genesis. Yet it is unclear if such self-reflective resources are equally available to an account that supplants the model of spirit with one of productive labour and the external mastery of nature. A similar comment may be made about the communist social order to which Marx's account of history is directed. Relying on a theory of subjective

autonomy dismissive of the introspective privatism of Cartesian subjectivity, Hegel's notion of history as progress in the self-consciousness of freedom thematizes in principle modes of the intersubjectivity presumably part of a genuinely communal social order. It is unclear if a model based on productive labour, involving as it commonly does an instrumental and even manipulative relation to external reality, has the same conceptual capacities.

Finally, concerns can be raised about Marx's critique of Hegel's account of political community. As noted, Marx rejects Hegel's solution in part because it relies on a series of mediations that reaffirm the public-private oppositions that an "organic" theory of community should surmount. Nor is it deniable that there are problematic aspects to Hegel's position, certainly in his account of the monarchy. On the other hand, general reliance on mediations remains for Hegel a crucial component in the effort to affirm political community under modern conditions. Given the scale, scope and complexity of modern societies, Hegel maintains – not unlike contemporary Alexis de Tocqueville – that efforts to forge some connection of individual and community are now meaningfully achievable, not directly (as may have been the case with ancient Greek city states), but only in the indirect form of intermediate group associations and organizations. In addition, an internally differentiated notion of an organic political totality is, for Hegel, the only one viable given the complexity and diversity of modern societies. Finally, internal differentiations are needed to accommodate the reflective identification of individuals with community required of a genuine polity, understood by Hegel as a self-knowing totality.

Hegel's position is evident in his theory of rights. Like Marx, Hegel is critical of the egoistic atomism associated with the language of rights. Unlike Marx, however, he does not reject the rights tradition itself; he certainly does not juxtapose to that tradition a philosophical anthropology defined in terms of what for him would be a problematic communal naturalism. Instead, he seeks to show that the concept of rights and the principle of human dignity upon which it is based cannot be fully affirmed and maintained without corresponding public obligations. For Hegel, individual rights presuppose and entail modes of mutuality and reciprocity, even as the latter presuppose and entail rights. In addition, rights, together with the principle of subjective liberty they affirm, are central to a genuine account of social life, one based not just on the co-implication of individual and community but on the conscious commitment on the part of individuals to that relationship. Indeed, it is with regard to the possibility of such cognitive identification that rights support a bond between individual and community that for

Hegel is more profound and “living” (*PR* §147) than the naturalistic sort Marx proposes as a correction.

Conclusion

A complete treatment of the Hegel–Marx relationship would have to consider Marx’s appropriation of Hegel’s thought as reflected in his writings on economics. This matter cannot be addressed here. However, by focusing on several core themes, I have attempted to show that Marx adopts an approach to Hegel which, while highly critical, represents more a further development than an outright rejection. My aim has been thus to clarify Marx’s stated intention to extract a rational kernel from the mystical shell of Hegel’s thought. But I have also raised some questions about Marx’s reception, suggesting not only that Marx may have misrepresented Hegel’s position on certain counts but that in some cases Hegel’s approach to common concerns may be superior to Marx’s. Whatever the proper verdict, however, the relationship between the two thinkers is clearly a rich and highly variegated one and one whose study enhances our understanding of each theorist individually while shedding light on central issues in social and political thought.

12 Hegel and existentialism

David Ciavatta

Hegel's philosophy was very much on the minds of the existentialist thinkers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Not only does Hegel stand out as one of the few thinkers of the tradition whose texts and ideas received substantial, explicit attention in the writings of almost all of the major existentialists;¹ his work also gave birth to various lines of questioning, conceptual frameworks and philosophical tensions that directly set the stage upon which many of the existentialists went on to develop and articulate some of their most original and influential views. Indeed, in 1946 Merleau-Ponty claimed that it was Hegel above all who initiated the philosophical task of coming to terms with the irrational dimensions of existence, a task at the core of all existentialist thought. And though Merleau-Ponty notes that there are "several Hegels" – depending, for instance, on whether one takes one's primary orientation from Hegel's early book, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, or from his later *Science of Logic* – he nevertheless maintains that all of contemporary philosophy's antitheses "can be found in that single life and work" (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 63).

Such an explicit acknowledgement of existentialism's debt to Hegel is relatively rare among existentialist thinkers themselves, however, as most of them focused more on what they rejected from Hegel's thought than on what they owed to it. For instance, in *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard famously criticized Hegel for failing to do justice to the individual's irreducibly singular relationship to that which gives existence its ultimate meaning (Kierkegaard 1985). However, the account he develops of this irreducible singularity seems wedded to the tensions between singularity and universality that Hegel himself brought to the forefront in his account of moral conscience – an account that Kierkegaard knew intimately (see Stewart 2010: ch. 7). Hegel recognized that our relationship to moral imperatives is inescapably mediated by our relationship to our own singular selves – that is, by our relationship

to our own consciences, understood as our “deepest inner solitude” and as the ultimate source of personal conviction – so that we cannot fail to recognize conscience’s claim to having a say in determining the ultimate meaning and significance of our actions and way of life (*PR* §136). However, Hegel also saw that, as singular, conscience is inherently at odds with the equally pressing demand (a demand inherent in conscience’s own claim to being justified in the face of others) that we as rational agents must recognize and hold ourselves to certain universal, communicable principles (*PR* §140). How we are to interpret Hegel’s final word on this tension is a matter of some controversy; in any case, his work was clearly important for bringing this specific tension to the forefront and this tension was clearly a productive one for Kierkegaard, even if he took himself to be at odds with Hegel in the end.

In what follows, my aim is to focus on certain key continuities between Hegel’s thought and existentialism, rather than on the ways in which existentialists sought to distance themselves from Hegel. The first broad theme I address has to do with the basic relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, that is, between the domain of human experience and practice – the realm of being that is essentially alive to its own existence and its place in the world – and the domain of objective things in themselves. For Hegel, the objective realm is not ultimately external to and independent of the domain of subjectivity; and so “knowledge” for him is not simply a matter of subjectivity conforming to a world that is prior and indifferent to it. Rather, the domain of concrete subjective life – the sphere of desire, feeling, perception, action, speaking, thinking, religious ritual and art-making – has an essential role to play in actualizing what Hegel calls “spirit”, which is that concrete, living context in relation to which alone there is such a thing as truth and meaning in the first place, and so that in virtue of which alone things can actually appear and, indeed, actually occur, for what they are in truth. This emphasis on spirit’s role in enabling the world to attain to its meaning and truth, I argue, has fundamental links to the critiques of objectivism and of the scientific world view that we find in all of the major existentialists.

The second broad theme I will address concerns the unthought, the non-self-conscious and the role they play *within* the sphere of subjectivity. Each of the existentialists had a stake in putting into question the rationalist ideal – as we might find it articulated in Descartes, Spinoza or Kant, for instance – of a self-reflective, rational subject that could in principle transcend its contingency and finitude through clear rational thought, so as to size up itself and its situation in wholly

universal and objective terms. Hegel's philosophy is often characterized as standing squarely within this rationalist tradition and perhaps even as offering us one of its most extreme versions; this is generally the picture that Kierkegaard paints of Hegel, and Heidegger, too, offers a version of this criticism in his extended reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology* (Heidegger 1970). Nevertheless, I suggest there is much in Hegel's work that anticipates the existentialist critique of the primacy of the self-transparent, rational subject, and Hegel's project is in this respect much more continuous with existentialism than is commonly acknowledged.

Subjectivity and its world

The existentialists took issue with the notion that reality is ultimately comprised of a totality of self-contained, fully determined objects, each with its own intelligible identity and truth. They also tended to resist the implication, operative particularly in sciences like psychology, that we ourselves are simply to be included and investigated as one among many of these objects. This objectivist ideal, far from being treated as a self-evident, unquestionable starting-point, is instead portrayed as an outgrowth of a problematic existential stance on our part, an existential stance that disowns its own concrete role in giving meaning and form to things. The ultimate nature of things, they argued, is more indeterminate and ambiguous than this ideal admits. And our own concrete engagements with the world – our perceptions, actions, our speaking, interpreting, our art-making – far from being merely an object of scientific observation among others in fact have an active role to play in *enabling* the world to come forth in its truth. Even Nietzsche and Heidegger – who, in the face of a scientific world view that would claim to unravel all the mysteries of nature, sought to show that nature is in its very essence *concealed* from us and thereby to show the *limits* of our knowledge – emphasize those ways of life that are indispensable for enabling this fundamental concealment of nature to be disclosed and appreciated as such. Nietzsche looks to a certain exuberant affirmation of finitude and multiplicity in all its unruliness, while Heidegger looks to a kind of poetic openness that is alive to the hidden nuances at work in our language (see Nietzsche 2001; Heidegger 1971). That is, the “happening of truth”, as Heidegger terms it, always occurs *in and through* our responsiveness to being – even if the truth at issue concerns a recalcitrance on the part of being to being brought to clear knowledge and even if we ourselves are not sufficiently

alive to the significance or implications of how our own responsiveness harbours this truth.

In this section I explore some key ways in which Hegel likewise attempts to bring into question the ideal of a wholly external, objective totality that is independent of subjectivity. I focus, in particular, on the method Hegel employs in his *Phenomenology* to show how the apparently rigid dichotomy between subject and object comes into question from the very start of his project. I also go on to argue that Hegel's central concept of spirit, as it arises specifically within the *Phenomenology*, draws attention to the way in which certain of our practices themselves enact and so concretely realize a suspension of this dichotomy, thus highlighting our active role in letting the ultimate truth of things come into being.

In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel investigates different "shapes of knowledge" on their own terms. Each shape operates with its own, autonomous standard for determining, not only what counts as knowledge for it, but also what counts as the proper object of this knowing. And while each shape of knowledge acts as though it possesses the final word on what the nature of knowledge and of its object really are, Hegel shows that, when we stand back and witness how these shapes actually operate in practice, discrepancies begin to appear between what knowing takes its object to be and what its object actually is in the knowing of it (*PS* §§84–85).

Thus, for instance, the shape Hegel calls "Sense-certainty", which embodies the claim that what we know most purely is the sheer, immediate presence of the singular "this", turns out to be at odds with itself. For in the very act of knowing the singular this *as* a singular this, Sense-certainty necessarily lays claim to knowing something universal as well – namely, the very form of "thisness", which is such as to apply indifferently to (or to "mediate") all the particular sense-experiences it has. And so, the *actual* object of its knowledge – what it itself is actually engaged with "in practice", as it were – turns out to be more complicated than what it takes its object to be: it is actually engaged with something universal that manifests itself only in and through singular immediacies. In practice, it itself takes this universal to be essential to the truth of its object, though without fully owning up to it (*PS* §110).

Having shown that the object Sense-certainty is actually engaged with is, in fact, more complex than Sense-certainty takes it to be, we move on to consider that shape of knowledge – what Hegel calls "Perception" – that expressly takes its ultimate object to be a mediated immediacy, a universal that manifests itself in and through a multiplicity of immediate sense-properties – what Hegel here calls a "thing"

(*PS* §§110–11). Hegel then proceeds to examine this distinctive new shape of knowledge on its own terms and similarly finds that its actual object is other than what it takes it to be, thus motivating the move to another shape of knowledge and so on.

Part of what this dialectical method of proceeding reveals is that the nature of subjectivity – here conceived most basically as knowledge’s internal take on itself, that constitutive self-consciousness whereby knowledge knows itself *as* the distinctive form of knowledge it is – and the nature of the object it is engaged with are inextricably linked to one another, are reciprocally determined within the same one process. It is not just that the knowing’s subjective take on itself proves to be inadequate in the face of an independently existing, unchanging object, such that, confronted by its inadequacy, subjectivity must revise itself in the hopes of better corresponding to something wholly external to it. Rather, the true object is in an important sense *already within* it, implicitly operative *within* its existing relation to itself. As we saw in the case of Sense-certainty, the new object that appears on the horizon – the “thing” – does not come from out of nowhere: the thing is nothing other than the particular sort of object that the experience of Sense-certainty, in its distinctive character *as* Sense-certainty, had unwittingly been engaged with all along. Had knowledge not been constituted as Sense-certainty in particular, then the thing would not have come on the scene *as* the real truth. The very form of Sense-certainty, on its own account, is thus plagued from within and the very *truth* of the *thing* is generated precisely in this recognition of Sense-certainty’s own *internal* tension. As Hegel puts it, the “new true object” issues from nowhere other than the “dialectical movement which consciousness exercises on itself” (*PS* §86).

As with the existentialists generally and particularly with the phenomenological existentialism of Heidegger, Sartre, de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, we see that, for Hegel, the truth of the object resides, not in a domain wholly *transcendent* of experience and its living take on itself, but rather precisely *within* lived experience itself. As for the existentialists, the task of philosophy is not to somehow step *outside* of experience, but rather to explore experience’s developing relationship to itself from within.

As Hegel’s *Phenomenology* proceeds, we meet with more sophisticated shapes of knowing, shapes that are more adequate, not only to their objects, but *to themselves*. Part of what makes a shape of knowledge more adequate has to do with the extent to which the subject of knowing comes to realize that the nature of the object it confronts is in fact not simply external and independent of its constitutive relation to

itself as a subject, but that the nature of its subjectivity and of objectivity are determined together, as part of the same one movement. That is, as the forms of knowledge progress, they become more adequate to the movement of the dialectical process that, as we have seen, is implicitly at work in them from the start.

Thus, in one of the book's major transitions – from the chapter on “Consciousness” to the chapter on “Self-consciousness” – we move from those more “objectivist” or “realist” forms of knowledge (Sense-certainty and Perception included) that are such as to take the truth of the object to be something wholly independent of our knowing it and so that to take subjectivity to be *inessential* to the object known, to those forms of knowledge that expressly treat the truth and essence of the object as dependent on the self's relation to itself (*PS* §166). As an example of the latter form, Hegel takes up “desire” as a shape of knowing in its own right. His claim is that to desire is really nothing other than to take the truth of the object I see before me to consist in its being-for-me; and so though the object initially presents itself as independent and separate from me, to take it up via my desire – for instance, to eat it when I am hungry and to be unsatisfied with it until it enters into this, its “true” state (that of being assimilated into me) – is really to demonstrate that what I saw in the object all along was merely a “negative reality”, nothing but its possibility of becoming me (*PS* §167). Here nothing that is not of direct interest to the desiring perspective – which is to say, nothing that does not afford it an opportunity to affirm itself as the self it is – even takes the form of a stable object at all.

Of course, this shape of knowing proves to be limited, too, and whereas in the “Consciousness” chapter it was subjectivity itself that was problematically taken to be inessential to the truth of things, in the “Self-consciousness” chapter the problem generally lies in the *object* not being given its full due. If, in desire, I affirm myself as the subjectivity I am by way of the negation of the object that appears to me, there must be this object there to negate and so the very presence of “that which is to be negated” must be granted some independent weight in its own right, a weight desire fails to recognize (*PS* §175). As the chapter on Self-consciousness progresses, we eventually meet with a shape of knowledge that, though it still regards the ultimate truth of things as correlated to a definite form of self-relation, has come to see the only genuine form of self-relation as involving a movement of total self-denial or self-sacrifice in the face of its object, now taken as an absolute Other. Its only hope of making contact with that which is “beyond” is to actively deny its own finite powers of knowledge and

accomplishment altogether, thereby giving itself over to what is infinite (*PS* §209). The problem is, however, that even this act of self-sacrifice involves an affirmation of the self's own agency, for the sacrificing self cannot help treating its own singular act of sacrifice as itself essential, thus implicitly priding itself in its ability to get at the truth (*PS* §222). Here Hegel anticipates Sartre's famous discussion of the self whose every attempt to give itself over to some objective cause or profession is belied by its very consciousness of itself *as* thus giving itself over (Sartre 1956: 101–12).

Eventually, in chapter 6 on “Spirit”, Hegel comes to consider shapes of knowledge for which the ultimate dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity is finally suspended altogether and where neither “moment” is privileged over the other. Here, the processes at work in shaping the concrete domain of human experience and practice are taken to be the very same processes that enable objects themselves to attain their own proper truth and meaning and so in answering to these experiences and practices, we are, at once, answering to reality itself (*PS* §439). Here our attention is no longer focused primarily on individual, finite subjects and the objects they encounter from without, but rather on whole “worlds”. That is, the focus is on a total context of meaningful living, which incorporates within itself, not only what *subjects* actually experience and say and do, but also a domain of cultural and natural *objects* that alone provide the proper correlates of these practices. Of course, one cannot fully understand concrete human practices without understanding the objective world that provides the material conditions under which alone these practices are possible. When we get to the “Spirit” chapter, we find that the opposite claim is just as true, namely, that one cannot fully understand the objective world – including the world of nature – for what it truly is without at the same time understanding the developed body of human practices in and through which this world is taken up and made significant.

This last claim, which clearly resonates with later existentialist thought, is perhaps most conspicuously brought forward in Hegel's discussion of “ethical substance”, which Hegel associates with the world of the ancient Greeks and in particular the world depicted in Sophocles' *Antigone* (*PS* §§446–76). Antigone feels compelled to bury the dead body of her traitorous brother, despite Creon's order to leave the body exposed. For her, what is at stake in this act concerns the highest human calling, that which trumps all other concerns, and Hegel reads this calling as having to do with our capacity as agents to transform an otherwise meaningless, purposeless process of nature – vividly exemplified in the brutal, unconscious way the lower animals of

the earth would tear the exposed corpse apart, without any concern for its integrity or for the human life that once manifested itself there – into something meaningful, into something that does not violate and thereby negate self-conscious self-affirmation and striving (*PS* §452). Of course, whether buried or not, the worms will get to the corpse eventually, but the burial ritual serves to ensure that this natural process takes place on *human* terms.

What Antigone brings about, in effect, is a world of meaning and remembrance in which human action and self-determination is possible, a world in which our actions make an actual, lasting difference in determining what actually holds in the real and in which our self-affirmations are not inevitably short-circuited or simply obliterated by an indifferent, natural world that stands fundamentally opposed to us. She does not seek to *erase* the death of her brother, but to bring even death – nature's final indifference to our projects, its most conclusive negation of free self-assertion – into the sphere of matters that humans can respond to meaningfully and thereby affirm. For Hegel, as for Heidegger and the later existentialists, the ways we comport ourselves in the face of death – understood as our most unsurpassable, most meaningless negation – provide the key to understanding our deepest relation to reality in general. Antigone further represents for Hegel the distinctively spiritual form of comportment towards death that operates in terms of an appreciation of the fundamental *unity* between subjectivity and objectivity, between spirit and nature. For Antigone, nature can appear as a *threat* in opposition to spirit – as is announced most vividly in its threat to obliterate the corpse without witness or ceremony – only on the condition that the practice of burial is already an established, enduring practice, that is, only insofar as there is something that *can be done* in the face of this threat. And so the opposition between objective nature and spirit is not the final word here, but appears only on the condition that the objective world at a more fundamental level *enables* spiritual action to take root in it and thus is in itself open to participating in our projects (*PS* §452). As Heidegger argued, the earth is not just that which closes itself off to us in concealment, it is also that which enables the distinctively human capacities for caring and dwelling to take place in the first place (Heidegger 1971).

The existentialists likewise tended to conceive of human agency, in its concrete embroilment with the world, as a sort of crucible in which the meaning and truth of things first arises. This theme is perhaps the most pronounced in Sartre's philosophy. Consider, for instance, Sartre's provocative claim that "*it is man* who destroys his cities through the

agency of earthquakes or directly, who destroys his ships through the agency of cyclones or directly” (Sartre 1956: 40). For Sartre, human actions serve above all to declare that things matter, and these actions in a sense *make* things matter in a way that they would not in the absence of these actions. Thus, human acts of building and preserving cities and ships *make actual* the significance and integrated identities of such entities and it is only on this condition that an event of destruction – an event that generates an actual, palpable *negation* of such an identity – can actually take place. Thus, in the absence of human acts of building and preserving cities, an earthquake would amount to a mere rearrangement of matter – with all the same positive matter that existed prior to the earthquake still existing afterwards, but only in a different surface form – and not the destruction of a vital, integrated, fragile identity called a “city”. (Note the same might be said of the corpse. Without human concern over the corpse, its deterioration would be but an indifferent reorganization of matter.) In this sense, then, events and negations of any import can only occur *in and through* the realm of human practices and concerns – what Hegel would call the realm of Spirit – and though nature erupts into this field in unpredictable and even destructive ways, it itself takes on a meaningful efficacy only in and through this field, in and through the free projects and decisions that are in the midst of unfolding.

Hegel on finitude and the unconscious

Hegel’s discussion of ethical action, as taken up in his engagement with Antigone’s act of burial in particular, highlights an idea basic to the whole project of Hegel’s philosophy. The idea is that subjectivity or spirit is what it is only in and through its concrete, practical embroilment with the natural world, in and through its attempt to make something meaningful and lasting out of the finite and changing contingencies of nature. We find this theme at play right at the outset of his account of Self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, with his construal of desire as the most basic shape of Self-consciousness. Unlike the Cartesian or Kantian self, which possesses an *a priori* knowledge of itself *prior* to any experience with the world, the desiring self-consciousness is able to attain a relation to itself *as* subjectivity only by way of its successful negation of its other, and so desire is in a crucial sense dependent upon this other. This inescapable dependency leaves it fundamentally vulnerable to the possibility that *it may not succeed*, that it may become lost in the other and thus alienated from

itself as a self. This possibility of failure, particularly as it comes to structure Hegel's account of intersubjective life – where the “other” I am concerned with defies my control and is always free *not* to recognize me as a self (a tension also elaborated upon at great length in Sartre 1956: 471–534) – is for Hegel an ineradicable condition of selfhood, thus setting his view of subjectivity apart from the Enlightenment tradition he, like the existentialists, distances himself from.

This possibility of tragic alienation plays an important role in Hegel's aesthetic theory as well. Hegel privileges human dramas over stories about the gods precisely because the gods are at bottom serenely invulnerable to the contingencies of the finite, natural world and so there is never much at stake – never much genuine drama – in their affairs (*LFA* 176–79). In the case of human action, however, spirit gives itself wholly over to the realm of finitude and can “return to itself” – that is, affirm itself as subject and free agent – only on the condition (never guaranteed in advance) that its given situation does not ultimately short-circuit its undertakings, that the world provides it with the real possibility of generating something meaningful and redeeming. And Hegel notes that, though in art, where spirit's free self-affirmation tends to prevail in the end over the indifference and meaninglessness of nature, we may find redemption in an ideal form, this is not the case in real life (*LFA* 148–50). At least Oedipus was destined to find out what he did – that is, spirit was “reflected back” upon itself – and in that sense was able to accept and, in some sense, affirm or own up to it, in all its terribleness. We actual, finite agents, however, do not share this cosmic destiny and we thus live in the bleakness of the real possibility that we may *never* come to terms with what our lives really amount to.

Thus Hegel's philosophy of action seeks to incorporate this notion that we as individual agents are inevitably immersed in matters that exceed our abilities to grasp and control them. Locked within our own individual, finite perspectives, we are necessarily blind to the full import and consequences of what we are doing, to what other agents will make of what we are doing and to what is ahead of us on the path of action we have chosen; and yet despite this blindness, we cannot fail to act, for even not acting is a determinate way of taking up our situation (see *PS* §§642–43). Hegel stresses that, in this situation of inescapable finitude, agents cannot simply excuse themselves on the basis that they did not know or intend what resulted. For though an agent's consciously held intentions are relevant for determining the nature of her action, the action itself has a kind of objective sense and will of its own from which the agent cannot fully dissociate herself

(see *PR* §§117–20; *LFA* 188). Uncomfortable realizations of the form, “you mean, that’s what I was doing all those years?” are something we can never safeguard ourselves from in advance. Like the “shapes of knowledge” Hegel studies in the *Phenomenology*, we as agents always turn out to be committed to something more than, or other than, what we initially claimed. And, again like those shapes, we are in a position to realize this only insofar as we put our claims into practice; we have to wait to see what our future selves and what other selves make of them.

Hegel’s investigation of the theme of the blindness of agency arises in, among other places, his account of ethical substance and once again focuses on Antigone’s predicament in particular. Hegel emphasizes that, though Antigone stands up for an established practice – the burial of the dead – this practice is an “unwritten law” and so, in contrast to the openly public, institutionalized, objective character of the city’s laws, is something “dark”, “inner” and “subjective”, something that relies wholly on the immediate, inner compulsions of individual subjects for its power (*PS* §457). Further, this law is something that neither she nor anyone else fully understands: akin to Abraham’s experience of God’s command, Antigone experiences the imperative to bury as immediately authoritative even though she does not and cannot understand its full rationale, and she heeds it in the face of the fact that everyone around her, including her own sister, thinks she is crazy. Hegel is in part concerned to show that such unconscious, “subterranean” laws are not ultimately consistent with our full freedom as rational agents, for we do ultimately need laws that are themselves transparent and that can thus be followed, not blindly, but insofar as they are understood. However, Hegel’s clear admiration for figures like Antigone – along with his admiration for the great heroes of history who move forward the cause of freedom without appreciating the full scope of what they are doing (Hegel 1956: 29–37) – suggests that he views such unself-conscious experience as an important, even irreducible, feature of our condition as human agents.

The irreducibility of the unconscious dimension of experience is also at issue in Hegel’s anthropology (Hegel 1978). Hegel here addresses many of the themes that became central in the existentialists’ exploration of the meanings at play in the more immediate, seemingly irrational dimensions of human experience – for instance, mood, fantasy, mental illness, emotion, sensation and the self’s relation to its body. On Hegel’s account, aspects of our experience such as mood, feeling and sensation are not as developed and autonomous as the conceptual abilities we display in thinking. However, Hegel does not simply

dismiss these aspects, either by taking them to be simply meaningless, objective phenomena, or by reducing their meaning to that of the purported concepts or judgements they imperfectly or confusedly express. Rather, Hegel treats these forms of experience as having a distinctive meaning in their own right, an “aesthetic” meaning that cannot simply be reduced to the sorts of conceptual meanings grasped by thought. Thus Hegel argues that even sensations of colours or sounds are not brute, meaningless qualities, but embody deeper spiritual meanings that we sense and feel and embody (Hegel 1978: 179–81). Likewise, Hegel argues that certain bodily phenomena are not purely physiological, but are inherently meaningful and expressive insofar as they enact certain spiritual ways of taking up the world: for instance, he argues that the general existential withdrawal from the world that we experience in deep sorrow tends to manifest itself in abdominal illness, precisely because the abdomen is part of the animal self’s “return into itself” (Hegel 1978: 189–91). In these ways, then, Hegel anticipates the psychoanalytically influenced accounts of the lived body put forward by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty – for they too sought to show that the human body is not simply one object among many in the natural world and thus wholly susceptible of an objectivist, physiological account, but rather requires a distinctively “existential” analysis that treats the body, first and foremost, as enacting certain basic stances towards the world (Sartre 1956: 404–70; Merleau-Ponty 2012).

In the face of the existentialist critique of Hegel as an arch-rationalist, we see that there are many ways in which subjectivity is, for Hegel, irrevocably plagued from within by its own finitude and by forces that exceed its conceptual grasp. It is true that the project Hegel takes on in the *Science of Logic* – namely, the attempt of pure thought, moved exclusively by intelligible, conceptual exigencies, to offer a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the concepts by which we make sense of reality – does raise the question of whether, in the final analysis, Hegel is ultimately committed to the vision of a rational subject that can finally transcend the boundaries of its finitude and iron out all the puzzles it confronts. But whatever our view of the *Science of Logic* – and there certainly are existentialist readers of it who have questioned the strict, “rationalist” reading I have just sketched (see Marcuse 1989; Hyppolite 1997) – it is clear that, in Hegel’s other texts, we find far-reaching insights into the rich texture of our lived experience as finite beings, insights that not just anticipated, but in many cases inaugurated, just the sort of existential analysis of finitude that occupied the later existentialists.

Note

- 1 The most notable exception is Nietzsche; indeed, it is doubtful whether Nietzsche ever engaged in any extended, first-hand study of Hegel's texts. Nevertheless, consider Gilles Deleuze's argument, not only that Nietzsche must have been familiar with some of the rival strains of Hegel interpretation that prevailed at the time, but that one could not properly understand the full import of Nietzsche's philosophical contributions without seeing them in the light of their express challenge to certain core Hegelian commitments (Deleuze 1983).

13 Hegel and pragmatism

Paul Redding

While professional philosophy as practised in the English-speaking world over the last hundred years has, for the most part, been hostile to Hegel and “German idealism”, exceptions are to be found within the American “pragmatist” tradition. Among the founders of pragmatism, strongly Hegelian themes can be found in the work of John Dewey (1859–1952), George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) and, to some extent, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914). By the mid-twentieth century, however, the influence of “classical” pragmatism within philosophy had waned, while the “analytic” approach to philosophy, traceable back to founding figures such as Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore and Ludwig Wittgenstein, was becoming institutionally dominant within most of the English-speaking world. Analytic philosophy had started as a reaction *against* Hegelianism and so Hegel’s influence might have seemed to have come to an end, but recently a generally more favourable orientation towards Hegel’s philosophy has once again emerged within the type of “analytic pragmatism” associated with the American philosopher Wilfrid Sellars (1912–89). Sellars himself had been at best ambivalent towards Hegel and aligned his own philosophy more with the approach of Kant, to whose “transcendental idealism” he tried to give a “scientific realist” twist.¹ Among his followers, however, Richard Rorty attempted to promote the discernible “Hegelian” dimension of Sellars’s work and extract this from Sellars’s “realist” aspirations that he criticized in ways drawing on the earlier pragmatism of William James.² In turn, Robert Brandom, deeply influenced by Rorty, has developed Sellars’s ideas in a way that could be used to reconstruct a more systematic interpretation of Hegel from a “social pragmatist” point of view.³ Such pragmatic versions of Hegel have been criticized by “mainstream” interpreters of Hegel and the question of what relation – if any – exists between Hegel’s philosophy and that of the pragmatists will probably be debated indefinitely. Nevertheless, viewing

Hegel's philosophy from the perspective of pragmatism and the tools it brings to philosophy can help elucidate aspects of his thought that might otherwise be missed or misunderstood.

Pragmatism

In a lecture in 1906, William James spelt out the characteristics of what he called "pragmatism" – "a new name for some old ways of thinking" (James 1995). The term, he said, was taken from the Greek word for action, "pragma", and the philosophical stance he described was first put forward as such by Charles Sanders Peirce. Crucially, Peirce had developed an alternative way of thinking about mental contents such as beliefs, treating them as "rules for action". To ask after the *meaning* of a thought is to ask after the "conduct it is fitted to produce" (*ibid.*: 4). Pragmatism, then, was basically a philosophical tool for the analysis of the meaning of mental states: "To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object", said James, paraphrasing Peirce, "we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve – what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all" (*ibid.*: 4).

James himself thought the approach of pragmatism very unlike the philosophy of Hegel, but Dewey and Mead, having both been deeply influenced by teachers who were part of the Hegelian revival of the final third of the nineteenth century, were more appreciative of what they took to be common to the approaches of Peirce and Hegel.⁴ The case of Peirce himself is somewhat more complicated. He was strongly influenced by Kant and explicitly *critical* of Hegel, especially on matters of logic, but this overt antipathy seemed to cover over many points of convergence between the two thinkers.⁵ In particular, both were critical of the "Cartesian" view of mental contents as privately accessible "ideas", knowable with certainty by the individuals whose states they are, but radically unknowable to others.⁶ Peirce's "pragmatic" criterion of meaning according to which the meaning of a person's beliefs *could* be understood from the perspective of another – namely, as the inferred "grounds" of their observable actions – had been raised as an alternative. Similar approaches to thought grasped as expressed in actions were to be found in Hegel who was keen to advocate a socially based, non-individualistic view of the mind. In the cases of both Peirce and the Sellarsians, the path to Hegel had been through the ideas of Immanuel Kant, and appreciating Hegel's relation to Kant might help

in understanding how his philosophy could find allies among the pragmatists.

Kant's "Copernican" assault on metaphysical realism

Kant is known for his "Copernican revolution" intended to overthrow metaphysics as traditionally conceived. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant famously proclaims that, with respect to the science of *metaphysics*, rather than thinking "that all our cognition must conform to the objects", we might "assume that the objects must conform to our cognition" (CPR Bxvi). This puzzling claim should be seen against the background of his fundamentally *Aristotelian* metaphysical conception of the "objects" in question that he has in mind. For Aristotle, the primary substances that populated the world at the most basic level were not simple lumps of "matter" but rather the material bearers of "*forms*" or "*essences*". As a thing's form or essence is what is responsible for it being the *kind* of thing it is and behaving as it does, knowledge of that thing will involve a grasp of its essence. Furthermore, linking knowledge to perceptual experience, Aristotle effectively thought of perception as a process in which the form of the thing known passes into the knower's mind (or a part of the mind – "*nous*"), where it comes to exist *without* the connection to matter that it possesses in the thing.

Kant intended to reverse key aspects of this picture. Rather than being passively imprinted into *nous* *from* the object *qua* formed matter, the "form" possessed by those objects as experienced and known was now seen as a product of the knower's own form-creating *activities*. But being an "idealist" or non-realist about "form" did not entail being a non-realist about "matter", as with Berkeley. The active mind obviously does not *create* the object, but "determines" the form that makes it available for knowledge and reasoning. But in turn, this seems to imply that what can be known is not the "thing in itself" – that is, the thing with the form that it possesses "anyway" – but rather that thing grasped *in relation to* the constituting mind of the knower. In Kant's jargon, what is known is the thing as "appearance" or "phenomenon" rather than as "thing in itself" or "noumenon". It is this fundamental focus on the *activity* of the knower in which something about the object is "determined" and the resistance to metaphysics as traditionally conceived that provides the broad framework within which parallels can be recognized between idealism and pragmatism.

For Kant, the decisive advantage of his "transcendental idealism" was that it made intelligible how we could conceive of ourselves as free

agents within a causally deterministic world. In short, causal determinacy could now be restricted to events in the world of appearance thereby bypassing the world “in itself”. If we can thus think of our actions *as* the actions of our noumenal selves, we can conceive of them as free. Many were attracted to this attempt to solve the difficult problem of free agency, but Kant’s actual solution was often felt to reflect an intolerable sense of one’s alienation from the empirical world in general and one’s body in particular. For this reason, many post-Kantians sought to somehow reunite the realms of appearance and the “in itself” that Kant kept rigidly distinct, but they did this within what they thought to be a broadly Kantian spirit, by exploiting a conception of the self in Kant that seemed to elude the appearance/thing-in-itself dichotomy. The first clear emergence of this pragmatist theme can be seen in the approach of J. G. Fichte (1762–1814), a philosopher who would be a key figure for Hegel’s “absolute idealism”.

In a well-known passage from his *Science of Logic*, Hegel states that “it is one of the profoundest and truest insights to be found in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the *unity* which constitutes the nature of the *Notion* is recognized as the *original synthetic* unity of *apperception*, as unity of the *I think*, or self-consciousness” (*SL* 584). Kant had introduced the idea that each finite rational being must have a certain conception of him or herself as what is doing the thinking. In the very activity of representing the world of appearance, I need to grasp myself *as* the “I” that is representing – the “I think” that “must be able to accompany all my representations” (*CPR* B131). As a rational being I must have a conception of an “I” – a “transcendental unity of self-consciousness” – in terms of which I understand myself as a thinker (*ibid.*: B132). While Kant said frustratingly little about this idea of self-consciousness, Fichte took it up and developed it into the doctrine of the actively “self-positing” I. It would also be the idea, as the quote above suggests, that would be behind the development of Hegel’s own form of idealism based on the peculiar logical structure of “the notion”.

From Kant and Fichte to Hegel

For Fichte, this conception of a “self-positing I” should not be confused with that of an empirical entity. The “I” does not name one’s body *qua* empirically knowable object, but neither does “I” name some immaterial entity that might exist independently of the body like, say, Descartes’ immaterial soul. Fichte’s I is simply not an “entity” of any sort, neither material nor immaterial, but is conceived more as a *process* embodied in a living animal able to identify itself by means of this

concept. Importantly, following Herder, Fichte had explored the idea of the possession of *language* as what allowed articulate thought (Fichte 1996). Once language is taken as expressive of the conceptual structures in which self and other are “posited”, Fichte’s picture of humans as “self-positing subjects” starts to look like the conception of humans described by Charles Taylor as “self-interpreting animals” (Taylor 1985).

We might naturally think of practical action as a type of mindful “determining” of the world: I intend that the closed door be open and I open it and thereby a state of the world comes to fit my intention. But from the Kantian approach, something like this *also* applies to “theoretical” action itself. In perceptual knowledge I might think of my mental states as *causally* brought about by the object perceived, but here causation is not taken as *explaining* my knowledge. Thus Kant had criticized Locke’s conflation of the relation of *knowing*, which aims to grasp the thing *correctly*, with the idea of the mind’s states as mere *causal effects* of the thing.⁷ In the mid-twentieth century, Wilfrid Sellars was to use such a criticism in his critique of empiricism’s “Myth of the Given”, broadly along the lines of the earlier critique of Cartesianism of Peirce. In Hegel, much the same distinction had been made in terms of the difference between the fallible “certainty” of the mind’s initial take on the world and the “truth” that emerges as the result of the mind’s *thinking through* contradictions that emerge when “certainty” is reflected upon (*PS* ch. 1). In Fichte, this idea is found in his analyses of the mind’s theoretical and practical activities, as the mind always *strives* to go beyond those immediate states in which it finds itself, attempting to *free itself* from being determined by anything other than itself. It is this that imparts to Fichte’s philosophy a proto-pragmatist attitude to knowledge, suggesting a *practical infrastructure* to all theoretical cognition itself: “All reflection is based on the striving and in the absence of striving there can be no reflection” (Fichte 1982: 258). “[I]t is not in fact the theoretical faculty which makes possible the practical, but on the contrary, the practical which first makes possible the theoretical” (*ibid.*: 123).

Hegel’s attitudes to Fichte were complex. While a student at the Tübingen seminary from 1788 to 1793, he had become friends with two other students who were to leave equally deep impacts on German culture: Friedrich Hölderlin and Friedrich Schelling. During the 1790s, while the friends maintained a type of ongoing collaboration, Fichte’s philosophy shot to prominence and by the second half of the decade, both Hölderlin and Schelling were developing their own sympathetic critiques of Fichte’s conception of the “self-positing” I.

In the influential 1794–95 version of his “Doctrine of Science” (*Wissenschaftslehre*), Fichte had sketched, albeit at a stratospheric level of abstraction, an account of what we now might think of as the “intentional” structure of consciousness. First, he treats the most basic feature of any object at all (whether it be actual or possible), in terms of its *self-identity*. For all A, $A = A$. But applying Kant’s formal idealism, such a *formal* property of the object must be understood as grounded in the unity of the *I think*. Thus, the idea of any thing’s self-identity must be “*in the self and posited by the self, for it is the self which judges*” (Fichte 1982: 258). In Fichte’s shorthand, $A = A$ must depend on the $I = I$, the latter formula being his first principle, the “principle of identity”. In the next two sections Fichte establishes further principles which are “reciprocally based upon” the first (*ibid.*: 120). The “principle of opposition” concerns the *difference* or *opposition* between the conscious subject and its object (the not-I). But a not-I “given” to consciousness implies a consciousness that is, as we have seen, *determined* by that not-I, disrupting its abstract self-identity. A third principle is then needed to reconcile the first two principles. The I must posit *both* itself *and* the not-I *as* opposed.

Reacting against Fichte while nevertheless deeply influenced by him, Hölderlin and Schelling had denied that the initial unity from which the opposing I and not-I emerged should *itself* be thought of as an “I”. Rather, I and its world of objects emerge from a primal unity more like Spinoza’s pantheistic “*natura naturans*” than some infinite anthropomorphic and self-conscious God or an infinite “I”.⁸ Hegel *too* was to challenge the primacy of the Fichtean idea of rationality as the striving for self-identity of an “I”, but not with the more Spinoza-leaning type of naturalism of his erstwhile friends. The context for the emergence of the finite “I” is rather the objective but “spiritual” social realm. One of the expressions of this transformation of Fichte is to be found in what is possibly Hegel’s most-well known piece of writing: his account of the social preconditions of self-consciousness sketched in the famous master–slave dialectic in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* of 1806/7 (*PS* ch. 4). Clear pragmatist themes emerge in this work.

The pragmatic structure of the master–slave dialectic and beyond

In a seminal essay first published in 1967, Jürgen Habermas drew attention to Hegel’s treatment of the themes of *language* and *labour* in the master–slave episode, an approach, he claimed, that anticipated the overtly *pragmatist* one of George Herbert Mead in the early twentieth

century (Habermas 1974). Habermas thus describes Mead as having repeated Hegel's insight "though under the naturalistic presupposition of pragmatism – that the identity of the 'I' can only constitute itself in the acquisition by practice of social roles, namely, in the complementary character of behavioral expectations on the basis of mutual recognition" (*ibid.*: 297, n. 11).

Like Kant and Fichte, Mead rejected the type of "passive" conception of the formation of objects of consciousness typical of the empiricist tradition and linked the consciousness of objects to patterns of practical interaction with those objects.

In so far as our physical conduct involves movements toward or away from distant objects and their being handled when we come into contact with them, we perceive all things in terms of distance sensation – color, sound, odor – which stand for hard or soft, big or little, objects of varying forms, which actual contact will reveal.

Our conduct in movement and manipulation, with its stimulations and responses, gives the framework within which objects of perception arise – and this conduct is in so far responsible for the organization of our physical world.

(Mead 1912: 401)

But human conduct not only involves actions towards objects *qua* merely physical things. Human actions equally include gestures and actions directed towards other *humans* and to the extent to which physical objects get caught up in the network of these social behaviours they are to be understood as "social objects", defined "in terms of social conduct as we defined the physical object in terms of our reactions to physical objects" (*ibid.*: 403). Social objects are physical objects but ones invested with properties that derive from the peculiarities of their functioning in social interactions. A ten dollar note, for example, is a physical object – a variously coloured piece of paper or plastic or whatever – but its properties (that I can exchange it for, say, two cans of beer, or one pair of socks) cannot be explained by those physical properties. For Hegel, objects acquiring *these* sorts of properties thereby acquire "spiritual" status.⁹ Importantly, for Mead, what distinguished the possession of the type of behavioural repertoire of which humans are capable from the actions of non-human animals was articulate speech,¹⁰ an idea found in Fichte, Hegel and others largely via the influence of J. G. Herder.¹¹

Chapter 4 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is, among other things, devoted to an analysis of the type of self-consciousness that Fichte had

developed on the basis of Kant. Hegel sketches a scenario in which a simple model of political life between a master and his slave can be seen to result from a resolution of an initial struggle in which one antagonist capitulates and accepts being enslaved to the other. We can see Hegel in this chapter as, somewhat like Mead, trying to discern the conditions necessary for an animal to be a self-conscious willing agent. Thus Hegel will consider existence within a *social* realm in which behavioural interactions are mediated by “social” and not merely “physical” objects, but, in contrast to Mead’s naturalism, will derive these conditions from a recognizably Fichtean starting point in which self-consciousness has two moments. In the first of these, “otherness is for it in the form of a *being*”, while in the second, self-consciousness is aware of its own unity with itself – it is, Hegel says, appealing to the Fichtean formula, the moment of “I am I” (*PS* §167). Of these two moments, it is the latter that is regarded as the “truth” of the former’s “certainty”. The object thus corresponds to the finite, conditioned moment of consciousness that must mediate any *self*-consciousness. Agency on this model is based on *self-conscious desire* and as such cannot be reduced to *natural* desire. Hegel describes this Fichtean model of self-consciousness as “*Desire* [or appetite, *Begierde*] in general” (*ibid.*).

Consciousness, as we have seen, is a central ingredient of the Fichtean model of *self*-consciousness, including *practical* self-consciousness, that is, willing. To be conscious of *myself* as possessing a desire is to be conscious of myself as being *determined* by something *other than* me, that is, determined by the object my desire is directed to. And rather than action being simply some sort of *causal* consequence of the naturally conceived desire, action on the Fichtean model is an attempt to re-establish the essential self-identity striven for by *negating* – overcoming the determining influence on myself of – the object. This is the Fichtean version of the autonomy that Kant equated with practical reason *qua* morality. But, Hegel thinks, this generalized “appetite” model of self-consciousness cannot maintain itself – it is self-contradictory. The conscious self must *strive against* its object, the not-I, just as the appetitive organism strives against the object of its appetite by trying to consume it. But just as the satisfaction of an appetite both removes its object and abolishes the appetite, so self-consciousness on this model would be self-extinguishing, since a resisting object is *required* for an individual who defines itself *as a striving* self-consciousness.

While Hölderlin and Schelling had tried to find the conditions for the emergence of a consciousness in some primordial unified “being” prior to “separation”, Hegel locates the *consciously desiring* agent

against a background of social life – the realm of objective “spirit”. The realm of spirit is differentiated from *mere* life by the constitutive processes of concept-using acts of “recognition” in which each member implicitly recognizes the other as occupant of some normative role, just as the slave recognizes his master as *his master* in the very act of obeying his commands. But in this manifestation of the relation of recognition, we find one consciousness as “the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself”, while the other is “the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another” (PS §189). And yet the master is in fact dependent for his identity as master on the recognition of the slave – “*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*” (PS §175). In not acknowledging the independence of his slave, the master is thus depriving himself of the conditions under which *he* can be properly self-conscious. As a form of objective spirit, such a society cannot actualize the features essential to self-consciousness, reason and freedom.

Despite its limitations as a model of the conditions of consciousness and self-consciousness, we can see elements within it that will be carried forward into succeeding stages that give a further “pragmatic” feel to many of Hegel’s central ideas. There may be hierarchical patterns of social life in non-language using animals, but there could not be, we might say, a form of social life with the *institution* of slavery with its conventionally defined social roles and patterns of interaction. From a linguistic point of view, we might think of the respective roles of master and slave as differentiated by the type of *speech act* that each can employ. Most simply put, only the master can utter imperatives like “cook me a fish!” – that is, perform the social act a consequence of which is that the one addressed *thereby* acts in a way specified by the words expressed in the sentence.¹² But the functioning of these linguistic interactions clearly depends on the possession of non-linguistic capacities to *act* in the appropriate ways when so ordered to cook a fish. First, as is obvious, the slave would here need to have mastered the techniques of cooking and, beyond those, others related instrumentally to achieve such goals – catching fish, lighting fires and so on. And skills could be successfully deployed only in relation to certain types of knowledge – where to find fish, how to know when a fish was cooked and so on. From this point of view we are encouraged to think of concepts as getting their meanings via the functional roles they play in these patterns of action and interaction between the interlocutors and each other, on the one hand, and interlocutors and the world, on the other.

It is in the context of these sorts of life-forms, run through with concepts that can be logically linked via their expression in language,

and that allow subjects to act towards objects and others, that Hegel's account of the practical infrastructure of practical and theoretical reason in the master–slave dialectic resembles the pragmatism of Dewey and Mead. But there are *further* themes running through Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* that resemble more the forms of pragmatism found in Sellars and Brandom, and before them Peirce. For Hegel, the *asymmetry* of the forms of interaction between master and slave ensured the ultimate collapse of this form of social relation. More *symmetrical* social relations, we might think, might involve interactions no longer resting on asymmetrical ones like force or domination (or even just unquestioned habit), but on the interlocutor's *rational* acceptance of the other's speech act by being given *reasons* to accept it. Thus Peirce, for example, had sketched different ways that different societies might establish the necessary "fixation" of the beliefs on which individuals acted necessary to ensure the integration of those actions within social life,¹³ and, as Hegel interpreters such as Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard have pointed out, Hegel suggested that *modern society in particular* sought to justify social practices in this way.¹⁴ In Brandom's work, we find an approach to meaning and the mind which builds on Sellars in order to link pragmatism and Hegel's idealism in a systematic way.

Not all readers of Hegel will find in pragmatism the key to unlocking the "secrets" of his version of idealism, but many of Hegel's notoriously opaque claims might be illuminated by the comparison of his ideas with those of the pragmatists.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to David Macarthur for helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this chapter.

Notes

- 1 On the one hand, Sellars referred to his influential work "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" as his "incipient *Meditations Hegeliennes*" [sic]. See Sellars (1997: §20). On the other, he tried to resist the paths leading him in that work from Kant towards Hegel. See, for example, Sellars (1992: chs 1, 2).
- 2 Rorty reads Hegel predominantly as a historicist thinker who destroyed the Kantian idea of philosophy as science and who created a new "literary genre". See Rorty (1982: 139–59).
- 3 See especially Brandom (2002: chs 1, 6, 7).
- 4 Dewey was influenced by his teacher at Johns Hopkins, G. S. Morris, Mead by his teacher at Harvard, Josiah Royce.

- 5 For a good account of the complex relations between Hegel and Peirce, see Stern (2009: 209–344).
- 6 See, for example, “Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man” in Peirce (1992), first published in 1868.
- 7 Thus Kant (*CPR* A86–87/B119) criticized Locke’s “physiological derivation” of the ideas.
- 8 For example, in the fragment “Judgment and Being”, Hölderlin (1988) had described the finite I’s capacity for concept-use or judgement (*Urteil*) as conditional upon an original separation (an *Ur-Teilung*) within the primordial unity of “being”. And so, as using concepts is characteristic of the I, I-hood is improperly attributed to the unity *prior* to separation of I and not-I.
- 9 For a comprehensive account of Hegel on symbols see Magnus (2001).
- 10 “That ... a consciousness of a self as an object would ever have arisen in man if he had not had the mechanism of talking to himself, I think there is every reason to doubt” (Mead 1912: 405). See also Mead’s “The Social Self” (1913).
- 11 See, for example, Forster (2010) and, with respect to Hegel, Surber (2006).
- 12 In this way there are clear parallels to be found with Wittgenstein’s quasi-pragmatist account of the “builder’s language” in which a “language game” articulates a “form of life” to give a model of the workings of language meant to contest traditional “naming” theories of language (1953: 2).
- 13 See “The Fixation of Belief” in Peirce (1992). There is already a strong hint of this quasi-political orientation to the fixation of belief in the final section of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, “Transcendental Doctrine of Method”.
- 14 See, for example, Pippin (1989) and Pinkard (1996), who both make the link to Sellars’s approach to the normativity of reason. For his part, Habermas went on to develop his own “post-metaphysical” approach to social philosophy grounded in the pragmatics of communication. See, for example, *On the Pragmatics of Communication* (Habermas 1998).

14 Hegel and analytic philosophy

Russell Newstadt and Andrew Cutrofello

There remains little agreement, despite several decades of increasing self-scrutiny, about what analytic philosophy is.¹ Until fairly recently, however, there has been almost universal agreement about what it is not; namely, whatever it is that Hegel and the Hegelians were up to. According to its founding myth, analytic philosophy arose out of Bertrand Russell's and G. E. Moore's reactions against British Hegelianism. Hegel was taken to have demonstrated that the only viable approach to traditional categorical logic was dialectical. The dialectical method enabled one to see that all philosophical claims, whether about meanings or things, amounted to partial truths that could be shown to converge upon a *single* truth concerning the Absolute. Against this approach, Russell and Moore argued that philosophy should take the form of conceptual analysis, guided by a new, quantificational logic that allowed one to see how individuals and referring expressions entered into facts and sentences, respectively. The aim of analysis, so understood, was to resolve propositional complexes into their basic atomic constituents. Russell had initially applauded Hegel for revealing the inherent limitations of categorical logic, and had joined him in embracing contradiction, the engine of dialectic, as the means of overcoming these limitations. Once he began applying the lessons of quantificational logic to solving philosophical problems, however, he came to think that abandoning the law of non-contradiction was a lamentable misstep, in part because it led directly to the conceptual and ontological holism he and Moore so fiercely rejected. As Russell saw it, the new logic suggested that the world consisted of discrete facts and things, an ontology that Hegel's commitment to the basic framework of traditional logic simply prevented him from seeing.

Russell promulgated the view among analytic philosophers that Hegelian philosophy was either incompatible with the analytic enterprise or, still worse, not a genuine philosophical enterprise at all. Yet

there was from the outset considerable overlap between Hegel's concerns and those of analytic philosophy, as a number of philosophers of a broadly analytic stripe have recently begun to recognize. Russell's polemical interpretation obscured the fact that Hegel did not abandon, so much as redirect the use of, the law of non-contradiction. He is best understood as engaged in a variety of conceptual analysis not unlike, indeed arguably more thoroughgoing than, the sort that Russell later embarked upon. Furthermore, Hegel's logic is more properly regarded as a concept logic than is Gottlob Frege's *Begriffsschrift* (*Concept Script*), the system of quantificational logic whose propositional form became canonical in the analytic tradition. It certainly departs more decisively than either Frege's or Russell's logics from the subject-predicate model that all three sought to free us from. However, appreciation of Hegel's philosophical ingenuity and significance would not come to analytic philosophy until many years after it began to reflect on problems inherent to its own notion of logical analysis, including various logical paradoxes and the difficulty of accounting for the unity of propositions (including those that are true, which Moore and Russell initially equated with facts).

Confronting these problems initially prompted Russell and his followers to develop more holistic, but still non-dialectical, approaches to semantics and ontology. By the middle of the twentieth century, Hegel could be begrudgingly credited with recognizing the errors of naïve empiricism and logical atomism, but such piecemeal acknowledgement did little to rehabilitate his reputation as a befuddled logician and an obscurantist metaphysician. With the recent abandonment or questioning of several early analytic orthodoxies, including those of bivalence and the much discussed "dogmas of empiricism", there have been glimmerings of a rapprochement with Hegel, a trend led by philosophers who believe that the semantic and logical holisms of W. V. Quine, Wilfrid Sellars and Donald Davidson have made Hegelian doctrines more philosophically attractive and relevant. Among these, Robert Brandom, John McDowell, Graham Priest and Robert Pippin are the most prominent. Each has found in Hegel a fruitful approach to a topic of current philosophical concern, such as the nature of meaning, truth, rationality or subjectivity. Their work is generally acknowledged as an important development within analytic philosophy, but it remains at its periphery, an indication of the tradition's continued suspicion of Hegel and its inescapable connection to him.

A significant but neglected aspect of this connection is the link between Hegel's and the early Russell's respective conceptions of logic, namely, that the purpose of logic is to afford access to the ontological

structure of the world. Recovering this link, we suggest, represents the most philosophically promising path to reconciling Hegel and the analytic tradition. What makes current efforts insufficient is the prevailing tendency, following Alfred Tarski, to approach logic as a purely formal system without regard to its metaphysical underpinnings. What Russell objected to in Hegelian logic was not its metaphysical mooring as such, but its intrinsic metaphysical idealism. Whether Hegel's idealism is best interpreted as a form of metaphysical holism (as Russell took it) or as a form of conceptual realism closer to Platonism (as we might be inclined to take it) is a question we leave to one side. The important point is that in rejecting Hegel's logic, Russell did not, as might be expected, adopt the view that logic is metaphysically neutral. On the contrary, he agreed with Hegel that the task of logical inquiry was to provide a metaphysically correct picture of the world. Believing at the time that Moore's "Platonic atomism" (as Peter Hylton calls it) provided such a picture, he applied himself to identifying its corresponding logic (Hylton 1990: 105–275, *passim*).

In our view, the salient features of Hegel's conception of logic and truth are his treatment of logical form as an expression of consciousness *and* concept, and his famous requirement that in grasping a concept we ultimately, if imperfectly, grasp "the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*" (PS 10). Part of what this implies is that acts of conceptual articulation are the primary bearers of truth, in the specific sense of *actualizing* rather than merely *representing* reality or the world. Such a view is fundamentally at odds with prevailing analytic perspectives which consider propositions, sentences, statements or even beliefs (considered as representations) to be the primary loci of truth. It also represents the most intractable barrier to understanding Hegel (besides the notorious obscurity of his language). A curious indication of this difficulty is to be found in the ill-repute of Frege's notion of *assertion*, or rather of *assertoric force*, which, as we hope to show, constitutes a profitable point of contrast and intersection with Hegel's notion of the speculative concept as both the form and act of cognitive engagement. We also hope to show that there are good reasons for revisiting the Russell/Hegel debate, not least because the prevailing view of logic tells equally against Hegelian idealism and Platonic atomism. Perhaps it is possible to tease out a viable view of logic that Hegel and Russell both share, one that doesn't *begin* by pulling the rug out from underneath their respective conceptions of a logical metaphysics.

The story of Hegel's relationship to analytic philosophy is a more philosophically and historically rich one than we can do justice to in

the limited space of this chapter. We believe, however, that the best way to approach the topic is to go back to the fundamental logical issues that first led to the divergence between Hegelian and analytic philosophy and that continue to keep them apart. In good Hegelian fashion, we divide the history of analytic philosophy's relationship to Hegel into three stages or dialectical moments:

- 1 abstract negation, or the simple repudiation of Hegelian philosophy as such;
- 2 determinate negation, or the implicit incorporation of repudiated Hegelian doctrines; and
- 3 the negation of negation, or a reconciliation with the Hegelian position as a determining ground of the analytic project properly conceived.

While we examine these moments according to their historical succession, they are also to be thought of synchronically, that is, as the structural elements that define this relationship.

Analytic philosophy's abstract negation of Hegel

For Hegel, an abstract negation treats the thing it negates (be it an object, concept or proposition) as mere falsehood or as *nothing*. This is how Russell first reacted against Hegel. As a student at Cambridge, Russell had been trained by British Hegelians who taught him to think that nothing short of an absolute idea – an idea that either corresponded to, or merged into, reality as a whole – could be true. Under the influence of F. H. Bradley and J. M. E. McTaggart, Russell sought to demonstrate the relative falsity of each of the specialized branches of mathematics and science. In *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry* (first published in 1897), he purports to identify contradictions inherent to the geometrical conception of space. These contradictions can only be resolved, he argues, from the more encompassing perspective of a kinematic study of matter in motion. At the very end of the book he suggests that kinematics gives rise to further contradictions that need to be resolved from the still more encompassing perspective of “Dynamics and Physics” (Russell 1996: 197). He had set himself the programmatic task of revising Hegel's encyclopaedic account of the dialectical hierarchy of the sciences.

Russell never carried out this programme. He would later characterize one of his unpublished essays from the same period (“On the Relations of Number and Quantity”) as “unadulterated Hegel”; or (equivalently!)

“unmitigated rubbish” (Russell 1995: 31–32). By the time he published his revolutionary *Principles of Mathematics* in 1903, he had repudiated dialectical logic in favour of a conception of conceptual analysis first advanced by Moore. Analysis was to be brought to bear equally on things and thoughts. Things could be analysed into constituent parts or properties, none of which depended on any other to be the kind of part or property it was. Thoughts could be analysed into constituent concepts, none of which depended on any other to be the kind of concept it was. None of these atomic constituents could be internally contradictory, since each was logically or metaphysically simple; nor could they collectively comprise contradictory wholes. Conceptual analysis made it possible to show that the contradictions derived by dialectical logicians were only apparent. It was not the case that geometry was rife with contradictions that could only be resolved in kinematics; neither did kinematics generate contradictions that had to be resolved in dynamics and physics. The apparent contradictions would be genuine if things and thoughts were inherently interdependent in the way that Hegel had thought. To show that they were not, Russell advanced a new conception of relations.

According to Russell, Hegel and his followers subscribed to “the doctrine of internal relations”, a doctrine whose logical and metaphysical implications had first been spelled out by Leibniz. On this view, the relations in which things and concepts stand to other things and concepts are *internal* to them. It follows either that no numerically distinct substances can bear any real (i.e. non-representational) relations to one another, as Leibniz seems to have held, or, as Spinoza and Hegel himself are alleged to have held, that since everything is what it is in relation to everything else, there can be only one absolute substance or concept of which everything else is an aspect or mode. Contradictions arise whenever a particular aspect of reality is treated as if it were separable from reality as a whole. Such contradictions disappear once we acknowledge that the relations that particular things and concepts bear to one another are *external* to them: “All the arguments used by Hegelians to condemn the sort of things dealt with by mathematics and physics depended upon the axiom of internal relations” (Russell 1995: 48). To this ontological thesis Russell adds the epistemological claim that it is possible to become “acquainted” with any object (be it concrete or abstract, particular or universal) without knowing anything about its relations to other objects (see, for example, Russell 1997). He concludes that Hegel’s dialectical logical holism should be dismissed in favour of the new logic of propositional analysis.

Russell's abstract negation of Hegel was inspired by both Moore's propositional realism and the logical doctrines that Frege had been developing for decades at the University of Jena. Like Hegel himself, Frege both studied and taught at Jena. By the time he matriculated in 1869, the once-dominant Hegelian paradigm had been almost completely eclipsed by empiricist, materialist and neo-Kantian schools of thought (see Sluga 1980). Trained in this milieu, Frege took it for granted that logical questions about the nature of mathematics were not to be answered in dialectical fashion.² In 1902, Russell discovered that Frege had anticipated his own efforts to reduce arithmetic to logic. He informed Frege about a logical paradox that threatened to undermine their respective efforts to reduce the laws of arithmetic to the laws of logic. The paradox had to do with predicates that cannot consistently be predicated of themselves, or (equivalently, as Russell thought) with classes that cannot consistently be members of themselves. Ironically, Russell's paradox represented the very sort of Hegelian contradiction he would earlier have taken to be endemic to logical inquiry. Now his view of the matter was completely different. In *The Principles of Mathematics* he confessed that he did not know how to resolve the paradox, but he expressed confidence that it could, in principle, be resolved with the resources of quantificational logic.

Frege was not so confident, but Russell forged ahead. Together with Alfred North Whitehead he developed his logically sophisticated "theory of types" and theory of propositional functions, both designed to block the paradox. Russell's solution, anticipated by Frege's hierarchy of concepts, restricts the range of objects to which predicates of a particular logical order could be ascribed. Any class of classes must belong to a higher logical type than the classes of which it is comprised. The class of those classes that are not members of themselves is of a higher logical order than its members and thus is simply not a candidate for either inclusion in, or exclusion from, itself. Establishing the details of this theory required the construction of a veritable fortress (or, as Hegel might put it, "whole nest"; cf. *PS* 374) of technical devices, but Russell did not regard his innovations as artificial expedients. On the contrary, he believed that the new logical system approximately described the actual structure of thoughts and things. Later analytic philosophers would take a more liberal view, representing formal systems as convenient symbolic frameworks whose axioms could be specified outside the systems themselves. Despite such divergent approaches, the appearance of *Principia Mathematica* (1910–13) marked the definitive establishment of the analytic framework. By

mitigating, if not suppressing, its potential for paradox, Russell and his heirs tried to prevent the ghost of Hegel from returning to haunt them.

Analytic philosophy's determinate negation of Hegel

Instead of altogether excluding something deemed to be false, a determinate negation *incorporates* the thing it negates. Analytic philosophy's abstract negation of Hegel was logically transformed into a determinate negation when cracks began to appear within *Principia Mathematica*. Despite its apparent containment of Russell's paradox, the system was shown by Kurt Gödel to be incapable of achieving both completeness and consistency. As Peter Hylton has pointed out, this need not have troubled Russell, for he did not regard *Principia Mathematica* as a formal system, but it did demonstrate the impossibility of carrying out the logicist programme in any restricted language (Hylton 1990: 287n). Tarski showed that Russell's system could not account for the nature of truth without recourse to a meta-level distinction between syntax and semantics. None of the mid-century logicians who worked on such topics seriously considered that Hegelian logic might have something to contribute to their investigations. Despite its flaws, *Principia Mathematica* continued to set the agenda for a "normal" logic, even if the proper form of such a logic remained controversial.³

There were other challenges to the analytic agenda. While continuing to think of analysis as the proper method of philosophical investigation, Russell acknowledged that there might not be simple "atomic facts" or "atomic propositions" of the sort that he and Ludwig Wittgenstein had posited. Wittgenstein himself abandoned logical analysis for careful scrutiny of everyday linguistic practices. Around the same time, Quine persuaded many analytic philosophers that the truth of sentences or propositions consisted not in their corresponding to individual states of affairs or facts but in their being constituents of an entire body of beliefs or scientific theory. This was an innovation that made the holistic approach to truth seem less implausible than Russell had made it out to be. Yet this concession did nothing to incline Quine to return to Hegel (or, for that matter, to Bradley or McTaggart), any more than Russell's paradox had convinced Frege or Russell to do the same. It did, however, open the door to such an eventual reassessment. In epistemology, Quine and Sellars reformulated criticisms of empiricism that Hegel had put forth in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind", Sellars credits Hegel – "that great foe of 'immediacy'" (Sellars 1997: 14) – with anticipating aspects of his own

critique of “the myth of the given”. Even for Sellars, however, Hegel remained a less relevant interlocutor than Kant, whose non-dialectical “Transcendental Analytic” could be more readily recognized as addressing philosophical problems similar to those pursued by analytic philosophers. Further developments in quantificational and modal logic seemed to provide Sellars and other analytic philosophers with powerful tools for reformulating and resolving traditional (i.e. pre-dialectical) philosophical problems. While the new paradigm no longer rested on unified accounts of truth, meaning, knowledge and so on, there was general agreement that the contents of declarative sentences (sentences held to be true, intended, known, etc.) were the primary bearers of truth and that philosophical work ought to be taken up with assessing arguments for this or that proposition according to the rules and inference laws of propositional logic. Traditional philosophical arguments could prove their mettle only by being reformulated in such terms – a translation that Hegel’s dialectical arguments clearly resisted. Although the later Wittgenstein and philosophers influenced by him challenged these assumptions, it remained an analytic commonplace that whereas pre-Hegelian philosophical doctrines were often logically confused, no philosopher was as systematically *illogical* as Hegel (a charge first levelled by Schopenhauer).

Analytic philosophy’s negation of the negation of Hegel

After the pioneering work of Russell and Moore, analytic philosophy developed in several different directions. Under the influence of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, the logical positivists eschewed metaphysics in favour of a verificationist semantics and an empiricist conception of science. Ordinary language philosophers, partly inspired by the work of the later Wittgenstein, went further than the logical positivists in attempting to eliminate rather than solve philosophical problems. Against these deflationary trends, developments in modal logic and linguistic theories of reference brought metaphysics back into good repute in some analytic circles. Each of these movements altered analytic philosophers’ collective sense of what, if anything, unified their respective projects, but none initially prompted a serious reconsideration of the Hegelian legacy. When such a reassessment eventually took place, it was facilitated by the pragmatist streak that had never disappeared from American philosophy departments. In the conceptual pragmatism of Brandom, a student of Richard Rorty’s, we encounter a sustained conversation with Hegel, a negation of the negation of Hegelian philosophy.

Brandom's inferentialist semantics is continuous with Frege's but is rooted in what he identifies as Hegel's *semantic pragmatism*. Developing a point of Gilbert Harman's, Brandom stresses the difference between "inferential relations" and "inferential processes", that is, between the logically static relations of implication that hold among propositions and practices of inferring, that is, of endorsing propositions and the implicative relations to which they commit us. Hegel's objective idealism consists for Brandom in grounding the "objective conceptual structure of the world" in historically exemplified inferential practices and commitments. On this account of Hegelian metaphysics, the world turns out to be not a homogeneous "bowl of jelly", as Russell had colourfully represented Hegel's metaphysics, but a set of inferentially linked states of affairs, something quite unlike Russell's own preferred model of a "bucket of shot" and perhaps closer to a *plate of spaghetti*. Brandom's Hegel is a *conceptual* holist only insofar as assertoric commitments are inferentially bound to one another, a position that entails a holism of neither facts nor things.

Brandom's *semantic pragmatism* rightly emphasizes the crucial relationship between practice and logical form, but in our view his invocation of the Harman point conceals an important insight shared by Hegel and Frege. We may call this the "Jena point". The Jena point is the insight that inferential relations are only *inferential* insofar as they are explicitly undertaken or realized. Hegel and Frege think this not because they overlook the distinction between implication and inference (i.e. between inferential relations and inferential processes), but because they think the distinction illusory: though we can of course specify implicative relations without employing them, it remains the case that without consciousness (Hegel) or assertion (Frege) deductions or proofs are just arbitrary sequences without relation. For both Jena philosophers, inferential relations depend upon semantic engagement: *assertion* for Frege, *conscious negation* for Hegel. (We will explain below why negation is the primary form of conceptual determination for Hegel.) For Hegel, semantic engagement is part of the *logical form* (*Gestalt*) of the *speculative* proposition. In Russell's preferred terms, this is to say that the relation between a proposition and its assertion is internal rather than external. However, the principal form of engagement for Hegel is not *assertion*, but negation or *division* (i.e. the composition of subject and negative predicate). If Hegel's idealism is read Platonistically, then what Brandom calls "the objective conceptual structure of the world" has to be thought of as discovered or accessed rather than constituted pragmatically, even if the deductions used to explore such structures are indeed a matter of inferential practice.

If, instead, we read Hegel as a holist but not as a Platonic realist, we can continue to think of the manner in which meanings are finitely expressed in judgements as essentially historical, taking their significance to lie not primarily in their material implicative relations but in their mutual reflection/expression of the absolute. Either way, Hegel's metaphysics underwrites a position different from that of conceptual pragmatism.

What is at stake here can be seen more clearly by looking at how Brandom handles the two central Hegelian notions of determinate negation and the "infinite" concept. First, Brandom identifies Hegel's notion of determinate negation with what he calls *material incompatibility*. This identification allows him to draw a connection between conceptual and inferential relations. As he puts it: "Material *incompatibility* relations induce modally robust material *consequence* relations" (Brandom 2002: 181). What this formulation overlooks is the fact that the deductive relations Hegel parses (in syllogistic terms) *between* concepts are in the first place relations *within* concepts (a point correctly noted by Russell when he imputes the doctrine of internal relations to Hegel). For Hegel, concepts are not established pragmatically, in "use", through their partially posited and partially discovered incompatibilities with other concepts. Rather, they are determined (whether in a Platonic or a historical sense) through internal negation.

Consider the case of an empirical concept such as that of the colour red. Brandom argues that because Hegel is committed to "symmetric relative individuation" he implicitly takes "the property red" to be individuated with respect to an entire set of colour properties, rather than being "asymmetrically" individuated with respect to the negative property "not-red" (Brandom 2002: 184). On either account, however, possession of the concept "red" is to be understood in terms of the inferential proprieties such possession sanctions. On our interpretation, self-negation, and so asymmetry, are primary. The concept begins (abstractly) and ends (absolutely) with negation, and the symmetric relations established with adjacent concepts are an external consequence of that concept's determination. Inferential resources are also thus intrinsic to the concept, although the specific lines of deduction developed depend upon the local, historical context of expression. To this extent the pragmatic dimension is an external, contextual feature of conceptual articulation.⁴ The aim of dialectical logic is to reveal such contradictions by "resolving" them into one another. The underlying idea is that, as acts of consciousness, concepts are conceived propositionally *in negatione*. This implies that their content is holistic in a

special way – not simply insofar as they collectively underwrite the implicative relations of the judgements of which they are constituents, but insofar as they function as mutually contradictory parts of a whole whose identity, or rather *unity*, they collectively determine. Thus, it is not that by tracking consequence relations between judgements we constitute the content of our concepts; rather, the point is that by tracking the negative relations within and among concepts (or, as Hegel prefers to say, aspects of “the” concept) we generate the content of our judgements. Here Hegel is clearly at odds with Frege (and with Kant), for he rejects the so-called “context principle” according to which judgements have semantic priority over concepts. For Hegel, concepts *drive* the judgements we directly and inferentially employ them in, but (at least on the Platonic realist interpretation) this is a matter of discovery or “restoration” rather than constitution. Hegel puts this point succinctly in syllogistic terms: “The *sylogism* is the result of the restoration [*Wiederherstellung*] of the *concept in the judgment* and consequently the unity and the truth of the two” (Hegel 2010: 588 = *SL* 664).

With regard to the *absolute* or *good infinite*, Brandom again interprets Hegel against the grain. In a discussion of Hegel’s argument for identifying consciousness with self-consciousness, he takes Hegel to argue analogically and weakly, from the fact that the intentional objects of consciousness have the same or similar structure (of infinity) as consciousness itself, that consciousness is intentionally speaking self-consciousness. This, we think, is to misconstrue Hegel’s notion of the true infinite, the structure of consciousness as pure negativity and the character of the holism that unites the two. Hegel’s argument is that intentional objects are always reconciled differences within consciousness itself, or within “the” concept through which the conscious subject thinks. Consciousness becomes self-consciousness when it recognizes that its intentional objects are differentiated aspects of itself. In this transition to self-consciousness, both consciousness and its object acquire the structure of a true, as opposed to a potential or additive, infinite (the so-called “bad” infinite). By reducing self-consciousness to the thinking subject’s mastery of inferential activity, Brandom effectively represents its infinity as nothing more than the capacity to make an indefinite number of inferential moves.

Brandom’s pragmatist reading thus sidesteps the Platonistic and/or holistic side of Hegel’s metaphysics, much as Michael Dummett’s intuitionist reading seeks to relieve Frege of his Platonist leanings. In our view, this is precisely where Brandom, and similarly Dummett, go astray. Hegel and Frege both place semantic engagement at the centre of their respective logics. Yet, as we have already begun to see, they

also diverge on this point. First, Hegel's metaphysics is centred on the reality and ultimately the truth of the concept, while Frege's is defined by the ontological independence of propositions, or what he eventually calls *thoughts* (*Gedanken*). Second, as we have suggested, for Hegel, the most fundamental act of logical and cognitive engagement is *negation*, understood in the scholastic sense of the decomposition or separation of subject and predicate, whereas for Frege it is *assertion*, or holding *true*, as applied to what he regarded as the only proper bearers of truth (i.e. propositions). What is thus endorsed for Frege are thoughts, the contents of properly formed sentences, whereas for Hegel it is the concept itself that is "asserted" even as it is extrapolated and retracted through the propositions in which it is sequentially expressed. This explains why Frege can adhere to the Jena point while nevertheless completely rejecting psychologistic reductions of thoughts to acts of judgement. It also explains why Hegel and Frege differ with regard to the logical place of cognitive engagement. Assertion, for Frege, lies outside the proposition and therefore outside the locus of truth. Truth belongs to the proposition or thought, which is merely acknowledged in assertion. For Hegel, on the other hand, negation is internal to the proposition since it is what generates its form. As such, conscious engagement remains the proper locus of (finite) truth.

As opposed to Fregean assertion, which leaves Truth as it finds it, so to speak, Hegelian negation ultimately retracts the finite forms of judgement it initiates and thus delimits their truth, showing them to be self-undermining. This is the feature of Hegelian logic that Russell perceived to be essential to it, although he failed to see that Hegel's ultimate goal was not to undermine all propositions or statements, but to replace the abstract proposition and its assertion with conceptual composition, decomposition and comprehension. This aspect of Hegelian logic can only be appreciated once it is understood that judgement begins with the negativity of the concept and that truth, which properly belongs to the concept rather than the proposition, is *arrived at* through the finite circuit of *infinite*, or determinately negating, judgements. For Frege, truth, which belongs to thoughts, is still more distant, something witnessed or acknowledged rather than achieved.

An alternative basis for a rapprochement with Hegel can perhaps be found in the work of Graham Priest. In Priest's development of *dialetheism*, the doctrine that some contradictory pairs of sentences are both true, and in his work on paraconsistent logics, which preserve the non-triviality of entailment relations while accepting *dialetheism*, we find what may be thought of as an incorporation of certain features of Hegelian dialectic into a formal system. These are roughly the same

two features that Brandom laid emphasis on: the inherence of contradiction and the notion of an absolute infinity. As regards the first, Priest accepts a circumscribed place for contradictions, remarking that “Hegel was right: our concepts, or some of them anyway, are inconsistent” (Priest 2006: 4). However, he says nothing of what is arguably the most important, if difficult, aspect of negation in Hegel, namely that it is *determinative* of all our concepts in the sense that the contradictions generated within a given concept are *overcome* and contained in the *absolute concept* to which dialectic eventually leads. This is not just to say that all or some of our concepts are inconsistent or contradictory, but rather that they are only concepts at all through the contradictory relations they bear to themselves and other concepts. Priest admits to finding the determinative function of negation too murky a part of Hegelian dialectic to warrant attention. Yet the waters appear murky, we would claim, only from the external perspective of formal logic. As Hegel remarks (*EnLogic* 82), there is no way to learn to swim but to dive into the water!

Priest gives credit to Hegel for having anticipated the discovery of the actual, or what he calls the “generated”, as opposed to the bad or “potential” infinity. In so doing he provides an admirably lucid account of the dialectical passage from finitude to its negation and finally to the sublation of that negation. Yet Priest appears to treat the dialectical process as itself *generating* the concept of the genuine infinite, whereas we take it to be the other way around for Hegel: the concept of the genuine infinite generates the moments of its dialectical extrapolation. In addition, Priest treats Hegel’s account as a circumscribed insight into the notion of the infinite without metaphysical import. He does not address the idea that what this infinite properly and exclusively applies to is the truth, or to the concept meant to articulate it. Priest’s dialetheism seems to lend itself better to Brandom’s Hegel than to the “Jena” Hegel we have tried to promote. Whether local contradictions can or cannot be tolerated in formal logical systems may be less philosophically important than the question as to whether a logic of concepts should or should not be supplanted by a logic of propositions. For similar reasons, we can be indifferent to the question of whether logical analysis should be taken to bear on timeless propositions, time-bound sentences or congeries of pragmatic commitments. On any of these accounts what it ultimately means to think rationally is to assess the truth of propositions, according to the syntax and inference laws of propositional logic.

Brandom draws closer to Hegel than Priest does in applying Frege’s insight that the meaning of a proposition depends upon the inferential

contexts in which it is deployed. We have argued, however, that he departs from both Frege and Hegel in thinking that this is all that metaphysical commitment amounts to. Were a genuinely Hegelian alternative to Brandom's position to be canvassed, it would have to proceed from the place where Hegel, Frege and Russell (and briefly Wittgenstein) fundamentally agree, namely, that logic reveals the structure of the world. Rorty, observing that it was Sellars's ambition to bring analytic philosophy from its Humean (i.e. positivistic) stage to its Kantian stage, credits his former student with taking it from its Kantian phase to its "Hegelian stage" (Rorty 1997: 8–9). In advocating the Jena point, it is our paradoxical ambition to bring analytic philosophy up to its Fregean–Russellian stage, that is, to the stage at which its founding claim on behalf of the primacy of the proposition can be philosophically assessed in a way that questions standard interpretations of Hegel, Frege and Russell.

Those who accept Brandom's idea that the way to reclaim Hegel for analytic philosophy is to read him as an inferentialist tend to represent the metaphysics of Hegel, Frege and the early Russell as baggage best dropped in favour of some form of philosophical naturalism. John McDowell and Robert Pippin, amongst others, fall under this heading to one degree or another. McDowell, who acknowledges the influence of Brandom's seminars on Hegel, describes his book *Mind and World* as a "prolegomenon to a reading of the *Phenomenology [of Spirit]*" (McDowell 1996: ix). In a series of exchanges with Stephen Houlgate, he has defended his reading of Hegel as a naturalist who, like McDowell himself, deplores philosophical appeals to "spooky" stuff.⁵ In a similar vein, but one less committed to logical inferentialism, Pippin also reads Hegel as a naturalist for whom "spirit" refers to nothing more than the collective capacity of human beings to determine themselves rationally. Paul Redding (2007) follows Brandom and McDowell in thinking that Hegel was a logical holist for whom judgement and inference remain the proper activity of logic, though he seems to acknowledge that for Hegel logic and ontology are fundamentally linked, even if they do not simply coincide.

In this chapter, we have concentrated on those aspects of Hegelian logic and metaphysics that have proven most vexing to analytic philosophers and thus on issues where we think they go astray. Yet it should be noted that each of the philosophers whose work we have discussed has substantially advanced our understanding of the relationship between Hegel and analytic philosophy.⁶ The path ahead of us may take us not merely through Cambridge and Jena, but across the analytic–continental divide to Paris and Freiburg as well.

Notes

- 1 Among numerous others, see Dummett (1993), Biletzki and Mater (2002), Stroll (2000) and, especially, Hylton (1990).
- 2 “[U]nlike Russell and Moore, Frege was in no way concerned with bringing down Hegelianism” (Sluga 1980: 176).
- 3 As Peter Hylton (1990: 391) points out, analytic philosophy has never achieved “the philosophical analogue of what Kuhn calls normal science” because “discussion rarely leaves the controversial programmatic level”.
- 4 In the particular case of the concept of red, we would need to look more carefully at the manner in which Hegel favourably compares Goethe’s theory of colours to Newton’s. An especially evocative indication of the contingency of inferential elaboration is to be found in Hegel’s amused reference to Anaxagoras’s sophistical inference that, since snow is made of water and water is black, “snow is black” (Hegel 2006: 308).
- 5 For the exchange between Houlgate and McDowell, see *The Owl of Minerva* 41(1/2): 13–60. See also McDowell (1996: 82).
- 6 Excellent recent work includes the essays collected in Nuzzo (2010).

15 Hegel and hermeneutics

Michael Baur

Understood in its widest sense, the term “hermeneutics” can be taken to refer to the theory and/or practice of any interpretation aimed at uncovering the meaning of any expression, regardless of whether such expression was produced by a human or non-human source. Understood in a narrower sense, the term “hermeneutics” can be taken to refer to a particular stream of thought regarding the theory and/or practice of interpretation, developed mainly by German-speaking theorists from the late eighteenth through to the late twentieth century. “Hermeneutics” in its broadest sense dates at least as far back as the ancient Greeks and is linked etymologically to the ancient Greeks’ mythological deity Hermes, who was said to deliver and interpret messages from the gods to mortals. “Hermeneutics” in its narrower sense emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, initially for the purpose of addressing problems in the interpretation of classical and biblical texts and then later for the purpose of articulating a more “universalized” theory of interpretation in general. This chapter traces the development of hermeneutics in its narrow sense through the work of Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), and then concludes with some observations about what Hegel’s own hermeneutical thought might mean against the backdrop of this development.

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher

Hegel and Schleiermacher were not only contemporaries, but also taught at the same time at the same institution – the University of Berlin – for a period of thirteen years (1818–31). Their personal and professional relationship, however, was not especially friendly. As early as 1816, Schleiermacher – already a well-known theologian at the

University of Berlin – did support Hegel's coming to Berlin, but he probably did so only in order to block another philosopher (J. F. Fries) from obtaining a Berlin professorship. When Hegel later applied for admission to the Berlin Academy of Sciences, Schleiermacher successfully manoeuvred to block his admission (Crouter 1980). Hegel and Schleiermacher did not systematically engage one another's thought; but it was generally known that Schleiermacher was suspicious of what he regarded as Hegel's overly idealistic and abstract systematizing, and in turn, Hegel was critical of what he regarded as Schleiermacher's untenable reliance on "intuition" and "feeling".

It was Schleiermacher's thinking about religion that led him to his work in hermeneutics. As a theologian, Schleiermacher saw the need to develop a rigorous account of the conditions and canons of valid interpretation, since the specific content of the Christian religion depends crucially on the interpretation of texts such as the gospels. Prior to Schleiermacher's time, it was common for those engaged in hermeneutical practice to assume that different kinds of texts (e.g. ancient classical texts, Scriptural texts or contemporary poetic texts) called for different and sometimes incompatible canons of interpretation. Schleiermacher's innovation was to begin developing a "generalized" or "universal" hermeneutics; a universal hermeneutics would be a theory of interpretation not tailored to any particular kind of meaningful expression, but aimed rather at articulating the canons and conditions for the interpretation of any meaningful expression whatsoever.

In developing his more generalized hermeneutical theory, Schleiermacher distinguished between two moments at work in interpretation: he called these moments "grammatical" or "linguistic" interpretation (on the one hand) and "psychological" or "technical" interpretation (on the other hand). For Schleiermacher, neither moment alone is adequate to the task of uncovering the significance of meaningful expressions. Through the moment of "grammatical" interpretation, the interpreter focuses on the common and shared features and rules (including philological, syntactical and etymological ones) that govern the uses of words within the language of the text to be interpreted. Through the moment of "psychological interpretation", the interpreter focuses on the unique and individual features of the author who produced the text to be interpreted. Through the interplay of both moments, it is possible for the interpreter to uncover how the "inner" realm of the author's individualized, unique personhood can come to expression in the "outer" realm of a common, shared language.

Operative in the two moments of interpretation – the grammatical and the psychological – is what for Schleiermacher is an inescapable

kind of circularity involved in all interpretation. This circularity, which has since come to be known as the “hermeneutical circle”, has to do with the fact that an interpreter cannot understand the individual parts of what is to be understood except by understanding the larger whole within which they are parts; but at the same time the interpreter cannot understand this larger whole except by understanding the individual parts. In the moment of “grammatical” interpretation, for example, one cannot understand an individual textual passage except by understanding the larger whole (e.g. the entire text or the whole literary genre or the language in general) within which the passage is a part; but at the same time one cannot understand the entire text or the whole literary genre or the language in general, except by understanding individual passages. Similarly, in the moment of “psychological” interpretation, one cannot understand an individual thought or idea expressed by an author except by understanding the author’s life or worldview as a whole; but at the same time one cannot understand the author’s life or worldview as a whole, except by understanding the individual thoughts and ideas expressed by that author.

For Schleiermacher, rigorous interpretation depends on a kind of back-and-forth or “oscillating” movement between the parts and the wholes to be understood; but it also depends on a similar kind of oscillating movement between the “psychological” and the “grammatical” moments of interpretation. One must understand an author’s (psychological) “inner” thoughts and ideas in light of the author’s (grammatical) “outer” expressions in language; and in turn, one must understand the author’s “outer” expressions in light of the “inner” personality that has produced them. The hermeneutical task of oscillating between the “inner” and the “outer” and between the “psychological” and the “grammatical” moments is an infinite one, however, and no interpretation of an author or of a text can be total and complete (Schleiermacher 1998: 11). According to Schleiermacher, a complete and final interpretation is much more a regulative ideal than it is an achievable end, and hermeneutical practice is much more an art than it is a science.

For Schleiermacher, the unique “inner” personality or mental life of an author is available to the interpreter only as mediated through the non-unique features of the “outer” and public language that the author shares with those in his or her linguistic community (or communities). Significantly, the author’s thoughts – as expressed and thus in need of interpretation – will inevitably be shaped by the language and linguistic heritage through which he or she expresses those thoughts; by the same token, the interpreter’s own language and linguistic heritage will also

shape his or her mental life and thoughts, including thoughts about interpreting others. Accordingly, says Schleiermacher (1998: 22), an interpreter who is engaged in rigorous hermeneutical practice will start from the assumption that misunderstanding will occur as a matter of course and that one must take special care in order to avoid it. Misunderstanding occurs, according to Schleiermacher, either because the interpreter is too hasty in his or her judgements, or else – and more importantly – because the interpreter is caught up in his or her own predilections or bias (*Befangenheit*). In order to arrive at a valid interpretation, the interpreter must minimize his or her own biases and strive to put himself or herself in the place of the author (*ibid.*: 23–24).

While there are many differences which might separate the interpreter from the author to be interpreted (these differences might include linguistic, cultural and psychological differences), it remains possible – says Schleiermacher – for the interpreter to arrive at a valid interpretation of the author's meaning, since there is a common human nature which unites interpreter and author and thus enables the interpreter to surmount the various differences and interpretive obstacles. In fact, argues Schleiermacher, it is even possible for an interpreter to understand an author better than the author understood himself or herself. Such is possible because careful, rigorous interpretation allows the interpreter to reconstruct and thus bring to conscious presence those creative processes which were only unconsciously operative in the author.

Wilhelm Dilthey

Wilhelm Dilthey not only wrote a biography of Schleiermacher but also commented extensively on Schleiermacher's philosophical contributions. Like Schleiermacher, Dilthey was deeply interested in the possibility of a "universal hermeneutics"; but unlike Schleiermacher, Dilthey was not motivated by theological or religious concerns but instead by a desire to establish methodologically and philosophically sound foundations for the pursuit of the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) in general. Following the work of what has come to be known as the German Historical School (including especially the work of Leopold von Ranke and Johann Gustav Droysen, famous for their attempts at developing a non-Hegelian account of history), Dilthey sought to introduce a heightened historical sensibility into his hermeneutical reflections. Resisting what he regarded as overly idealistic tendencies in Schleiermacher's thought, Dilthey argued that it is "non-historical" to think that there is an underlying "human nature" which remains "self-identical in its

religious and ethical formation” and only “limited by place and time in a merely external fashion” (1972: 239). With his intensified emphasis on history and the historicity of all human reality, Dilthey can be understood as having radically expanded the idea of a “hermeneutical circle”: with Dilthey, the whole within which individual expressions are to be understood is no longer the whole of a text or of a literary genre or even of language itself, but rather the whole of history.¹ But against what he took to be Hegel’s excessively rationalistic, metaphysical construction of history, Dilthey insisted on giving due emphasis to the finitude and irrationality of concrete, human existence. Furthermore, because the course of history is never complete (it is always incomplete so long as there is anyone still alive and capable of doing any interpreting at all), it follows that no interpretation can be final or complete, just as Schleiermacher said (but now, with Dilthey, the reason for this inescapable incompleteness is more directly tied to an argument about human history and historicity).

One very suggestive element in Dilthey’s attempt to “historicize” Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics can be found in his treatment of Schleiermacher’s doctrine of the *Keimentschluß*. For Schleiermacher, the *Keimentschluß* – which can be roughly translated as “germinal resolve” – pertains to the originating idea or initial intention to which an author is committed (even if unconsciously so) when he or she starts bringing inner thought to outward expression. It is this *Keimentschluß* that is implicitly operative at the beginning of an author’s creative endeavours and that implicitly animates the author’s further decisions and choices when bringing thought to expression. It is this *Keimentschluß* that also guides the interpreter’s thinking about the inner unity and coherence of an author’s work and thereby enables the interpreter to understand individual passages by placing them within the context of a unifying, overall intention that circumscribes the work. This idea of a *Keimentschluß*, from Dilthey’s point of view, amounted to an untenable, unhistorical “pre-formationist” theory of meaning and interpretation (1966: 781). For Dilthey, the unity which belongs to a work to be interpreted does not have to be understood in connection with any *Keimentschluß* or any “original productive impulse of the whole”. The unity “could just as readily be *brought about* by something that is added from without”; that which is added from without could be a later, retrospective decision by the author, or perhaps even by an interpreter (*ibid.*).

With his critique of Schleiermacher’s doctrine of the *Keimentschluß*, Dilthey had begun – though without being fully aware of it himself – to transform what is meant by the idea that an interpreter can

understand an author better than the author understood himself or herself. For Dilthey, the possibility of such “better understanding” is no longer necessarily tied to the Schleiermacherian idea that the interpreter can bring to conscious presence those creative processes which operate only unconsciously in the author. With Dilthey, the suggestion is made that such “better understanding” is possible just because the interpretation occurs within a specifically *temporal* and specifically *historical* context, which is to say that it occurs *after* the author has expressed himself or herself.

But even as Dilthey had begun to “historicize” Schleiermacher’s thought, he remained committed in many ways to the basic outlines of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics. Thus Dilthey retained Schleiermacher’s idea that valid – even if incomplete – interpretation is achieved to the extent that the interpreter minimizes the potentially distorting effects of his or her own historical circumstances and thereby brings about a “reconstruction” (*Nachbildung*) of the otherwise inaccessible and alien form of life to be interpreted.

Martin Heidegger

Dilthey’s work exercised an enormous influence on the emerging thought of the young Martin Heidegger; indeed, Heidegger observed that key elements of his work in *Being and Time* arose “in the process of appropriating the labours of Wilhelm Dilthey” (1962: 449). However, Heidegger’s hermeneutical thought also marked a radical departure from the thought of Dilthey. For Heidegger, interpretation does not consist most primordially in the activity of “reconstructing” an alien form of life to be understood, as Dilthey held; it consists rather in the activity of becoming the *self-interpreting* kind of being that one is in the first place. For Heidegger, human beings (whether they are consciously aware of it or not) are always already self-interpreting beings. This is because human beings, in the midst of all their involvements with things and persons other than themselves, are most primordially concerned about their very own being, and they remain thus concerned, even when their involvements with other beings induce them to overlook or even deny this basic truth about themselves.

Dilthey himself had already touched upon this basic truth when he acknowledged that “life” as such is always self-interpreting. But for Heidegger, Dilthey’s account of the intrinsically self-interpreting character of the human being (or of “life”) was an inadequate and distorted account, since it was unaccompanied by an ontologically adequate account of the human being as such. Against Dilthey,

Heidegger argued that an ontologically adequate account would reveal that the human being is concerned with its own being not as something present, but always only as something that is (yet) to be: the being about which the human being is most primordially concerned (its very own being) is its potentiality-to-be, which makes sense only as futural. The human being is always already self-interpreting, since it is always already concerned with its own being as a potentiality-to-be (and thus never as something to be found or made present); and it is only because of its concern with its own being as potentiality-to-be (or as futural), that it can be concerned with (and find meanings in) things or persons that are present within its world. It is misleading, then, to think of the human being as a kind of entity (or even as an instance of "life") that can be found or made present among other entities; the human being is better understood as the non-present "place" or "locus" for the coming-to-presence of any being or entity in the first place. Heidegger uses a neologism to convey what, for him, is an ontologically adequate account of the human being: the human being as self-interpreter is to be understood as "Dasein", a term that literally means "there-being", and which is meant to convey the sense that beings or entities come-to-presence or show themselves within the world only "there" where the human being (Dasein) is, as a being concerned about its own being.

Heidegger's "ontological turn" in hermeneutics has at least three important implications. First, according to Heidegger, it is impossible to understand Dasein's activity as an interpreter if one does not understand the radical temporality of Dasein. For Heidegger, Dasein is a being which is primordially concerned about its own potentiality-for-being; it is a being for which its own potentiality-for-being is always an issue. Accordingly, all of Dasein's involvements with things and with persons in its world are what they are, only as "projects" for Dasein, or as "projections" of Dasein upon its own potentiality-for-being. Dasein is thus always already "projective" or "ahead-of-itself" and thus is always already futural. But furthermore, Dasein's being-ahead-of-itself or futurity depends on its pastness, or on its having been "thrown" into a world. Crucially, the world into which Dasein is thrown is not a collection of things within which Dasein finds itself as one entity among others. Just as Dasein's being-ahead-of-itself is not a being-ahead towards anything present or actual at all, so too Dasein's being-thrown is not a being-thrown into a world that is any actual (or empirically given) state of affairs. In a sense, Dasein's being-thrown is simply its being-thrown into the very kind of being that it is, such that it must always take up the task of confronting its own being as an issue for it,

but it must do so by depending on the meanings it is able to find in its engagement with beings other than itself. Heidegger's analysis of the radical, finite temporality of Dasein leads him to his ground-breaking conclusions about being and time: for Heidegger, the presencing or the Being of beings is made available to Dasein precisely because of the temporality (or futural pastness) that Dasein itself is. It is Dasein's temporality – its futural pastness or its thrown projection – that opens Dasein up to the presencing or Being of beings in the first place: "the present arises in the unity of the temporalizing of temporality out of the future and having been ... Insofar as Dasein temporalizes itself, a world *is* too" (Heidegger 1962: 417). In short: no beings would "show up" *as* beings within Dasein's world, if Dasein were not concerned about its own being within the structure of its finite temporality or thrown projection.

Second, Heidegger's ontological analysis of Dasein's finite temporality leads to a radically new account of interpretation. Like Dilthey and Schleiermacher, Heidegger holds that there can be no "pre-suppositionless" interpretation; there can be no interpretation that is altogether unconditioned by the living ideas and concerns animating the interpreter's own form of life. But unlike these two, Heidegger denies that the interpreter's own ideas or concerns somehow block the path to successful interpretation. For Heidegger, it is the interpreter's own set of ideas and concerns (founded upon Dasein's status as a radically finite, temporal and thus historical being) that *makes possible* all interpretation. Unlike Schleiermacher and Dilthey, Heidegger holds that successful interpretation does not depend on "bridging" any ontological gaps between interpreter and interpreted, or on "reconstructing" the otherwise alien life-forms that one seeks to interpret. It depends rather on the temporalizing that Dasein itself is: Dasein grapples with the issue of its own potentiality-for-being by drawing meaning from things other than itself and from expressions other than its own self-expressions. For Heidegger, it is misleading to think of Dasein as an entity *within* time or *within* history which thereby needs to bridge a gap that separates it from other things or other persons *within* time or history. It is more accurate to think of Dasein as the openness or the horizon which constitutes temporality or history itself and upon which the presencing or the self-revelment of beings is projected in the first place. For Heidegger, it follows that the "truth" of any interpretation is not a matter of simple "correctness" or simple "correspondence" between what is inside and what is outside the mind of the interpreter (or Dasein). Truth always involves a kind of uncovering or revelment which inescapably happens within the context of

the finite, temporalizing horizon that Dasein is; thus the happening of truth is never an “all-at-once” or an “all-or-nothing” affair. Truth, as it were, always comes in degrees; every expression and every interpretation is “more” or “less” revealing of the matter being expressed or interpreted. Accordingly, every instance of truth or relative revealment is also an instance of untruth or relative concealment; and so every instance of true expression or true interpretation calls for further expression, further interpretation and further revealment and equally engenders further concealment; and so on *ad infinitum*.

Third, Heidegger’s account fundamentally transforms the meaning of the hermeneutical circle. For Heidegger, the problem with Schleiermacher and Dilthey was that they discussed the hermeneutical circle as if its significance were limited to the parts and wholes of theoretically knowable objects of propositional discourse (e.g. texts, literary genres, languages, authors’ lives or history itself). For Heidegger, the significance of the hermeneutical circle is most primordially understood if one thinks of it in terms of Dasein’s own temporal structure as thrown projection: Dasein comes to an understanding of the meaning of its own potentiality-for-being (as a whole) only by understanding the meanings disclosed by particular things and particular persons (parts) within its world; but in turn, Dasein comes to an understanding of the meanings disclosed by particular things and persons (parts) only by understanding these within the context of its primordial concern with its own potentiality-for-being (as a whole). The point can be illustrated through the notion of question-asking: there is no such thing as presuppositionless question-asking; the questioner’s posing of any genuine question at all presupposes that the questioner has already understood at least something about the subject matter in question; and this prior understanding in turn is animated and informed by the questioner’s own concern about his or her own potentiality-for-being. Now the prior understanding which enables the questioner’s questions about a particular subject matter at hand cannot itself be immediately, directly or “all at once” put into question in the questioner’s very act of questioning that particular subject matter.² But it is possible for the answers obtained through a questioner’s particular questioning to lead the questioner *after the fact* to revise the prior understandings (and prior self-understandings) which made possible the particular questioning in the first place. Thus Heidegger’s hermeneutical circle is a self-revising circle, always “on the move”, so to speak; and since it is a circle grounded in the questioner’s own finite temporality, it operates without any claims of privileged access to an overarching “metanarrative” that would provide a final context and final meaning to all events and

expressions in human history. This account of the hermeneutical circle helps to explain the wrongheadedness of Schleiermacher's doctrine of the *Keimentschluß*: an interpreter's initial understanding of what constitutes the guiding "essence" or "core" of a particular expression is always subject to being revised or even jettisoned in light of answers given to the questions made possible by that initial understanding itself. It is always possible that what an interpreter initially takes to be the "essential" message of another's expression might turn out to be "inessential" (and that the "inessential" might turn out to be "essential") in light of further questions and answers. This also helps to explain why it is possible for an interpreter to understand an author better than the author understood himself or herself: not because the interpreter brings to conscious presence those ideas which operate only unconsciously in the author's mind, but rather because the interpreter comes along *after the fact* and is thus able to "wait and see" what the author's meaning might reveal itself to be.

Gadamer on Hegel, and Hegel's hermeneutics

According to Heidegger, Hegel was blocked from giving a genuine account of the human being (Dasein) as interpretive and self-interpretive since his account was based on an "ordinary" or "vulgar" concept of time derived from the entities present within Dasein's world and not from the originary temporal structure of Dasein itself (Heidegger 1962: 480–86). Hans-Georg Gadamer, one of Heidegger's most influential students and expositors, seems somewhat more generous in his assessment of Hegel. Gadamer acknowledges that Hegel's hermeneutical thought is superior to that of Schleiermacher, since Hegel realized that truthful interpretation does not depend on the bridging of a gap between interpreter or interpreted or on the "reconstruction" of an alien form of life, but depends rather on the "thoughtful mediation" of the past with contemporary life where this mediation does not signify any kind of "external relationship" (Gadamer 1992: 168–69). Nevertheless, Gadamer faults Hegel for having failed to provide a fully adequate account of interpretation. For Gadamer, Hegel mistakenly thought that the radical finitude of our temporally conditioned knowledge could be overcome insofar as history itself could be "superseded" by "absolute knowing" (*ibid.*: 231), meaning the complete unification or comprehension of the whole of human history "in a present self-consciousness" which coincided with the completion of Hegel's systematic philosophy (*ibid.*: 234).

But should Gadamer himself be given the last word on Hegel? Perhaps not. Along with Heidegger and Gadamer, Hegel would readily

acknowledge that the human being, in the midst of all of its involvements with other beings, is most primordialily concerned with its own, non-present and non-presentable potentiality-for-being (or not-being) the kind of being that it is. By the early 1800s, Hegel had already developed an account of human existence according to which the human being's freedom is not to be understood in terms of the being or not-being of this or that entity within its world, but rather in terms of the being or not-being of the human being's own self (and thus the being or not-being of the entire world that exists for the human self; Hegel 1975c: 89).³

Along with Heidegger and Gadamer, Hegel would also readily acknowledge that the human being's activity of interpreting things other than itself is always bound up with and made possible by the human being's primordial activity of self-interpretation (even when this latter activity remains unacknowledged or opaque). To express the matter in terminology drawn from Hegel's own post-Kantian language: there can be no object *for* a subject if the subject is not *for itself* and no subject *for* itself if there is no object *for* the subject; or alternatively, built into all consciousness of objects is self-consciousness and built into all self-consciousness is a consciousness of objects.⁴ But if Heidegger, Gadamer and Hegel seem to agree on this basic point, what leads Hegel to conclusions which Heidegger and Gadamer ultimately wish to resist?

We can begin to address this question by considering the following (if oversimplified) summary of the basic argument of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to Hegel, a determinate (i.e. finite or situated) knowing subject can have knowledge of a determinate knowable object, only because the determinacy which constitutes the knowing subject's own activity as a knower is suited to and indeed makes possible the determinacy which renders the object knowable to it as subject. An object has the particular determinacy and thus the particular knowability that it has *for* a knowing subject, only because the knowing subject in turn has the (reciprocally suited) sort of determinacy that it has. If the knowing subject and the knowable object were not reciprocally co-determined by and thus reciprocally suited to each other in this way, then they would have nothing to do with one another *qua* subject and object; but in that case, it would not be possible for the knowing subject to have knowledge of the known object, or even to recognize the object as knowable in principle. Now Hegel argues that no determinate (i.e. finite or situated) knowing subject can give a fully adequate account of the role that its own determinate activity plays in constituting and thus in rendering knowable the object which it

actually knows. Thus the determinacy in the determinate subject which makes possible the determinacy and thus knowability of the determinate object is a determinacy which necessarily escapes full comprehension by the determinate subject engaged in the act of determinate knowing.⁵ It is a determinacy which can be thematized and thus made into an object of theoretical comprehension only *for another subject*. It is for this reason, Hegel argues, that the journey of knowing that takes place in the *Phenomenology* must unfold on the basis of a methodological distinction between “observing” and “observed” consciousness. For Hegel, “we philosophical observers” look on in order to see how “ordinary” (“observed”) consciousness encounters various objects as given to it and how this ordinary consciousness tries (though inadequately) to give an account of its knowledge of such objects. The journey of the *Phenomenology* is completed in “absolute knowing” when “we philosophical observers” (a) realize that all such (inadequate) attempts by “ordinary consciousness” have been exhausted and also (b) realize that the “ordinary consciousness” which we philosophers have been observing (the ordinary consciousness which counts as the “object” of *our* observations) is actually not an alien entity outside of us but is in fact the (inadequately articulated) story of the coming-to-be of our own selves as the philosophical observers that we are.

The preceding summary apparently gives some credence to Gadamer’s complaint that Hegel ultimately sought to “supersede” human finitude by offering a final, conceptual comprehension of human history in the “present self-consciousness” of “absolute knowing”. But perhaps there is another way to understand Hegel; perhaps an essential element in Hegel’s account of the coincidence of ordinary consciousness and philosophical consciousness is not just the *comprehension* of the former by the latter, but also the latter’s *indebtedness* to the former. For Hegel, philosophical consciousness can be what it is, only insofar as it has come onto the scene *after* its other (ordinary consciousness) has expressed itself and thus made an appearance as an *object for* philosophical consciousness. Philosophical consciousness engages in the activity of “absolute knowing” when it overcomes the appearance of otherness between itself and its object (ordinary consciousness). But it overcomes this appearance of otherness, not so much because it accommodates the other to itself but rather because it accommodates itself to the other; not so much because it fully internalizes the other that has preceded it, but rather because it finds itself indebted to the other that has preceded it. Hegel describes the emergence of “absolute knowing” as consisting in a kind of “renunciation” or “abandonment”: it is only when the knower renounces a “subjective characterization” of

its actions and thus abandons the idea that its acts of knowing are wholly determined by itself alone, that it can enter into the activity of “absolute knowing” (PS 407–08). For Hegel, to engage in the activity of internalization (*Erinnerung*) which is absolute knowing is to remember (*erinnern*) one’s own indebtedness (or “thrownness”).

But there is another way in which philosophical consciousness coincides with ordinary consciousness in absolute knowing. Just as the truth of the philosophical knower’s activity depends on *what has taken place before* (in ordinary consciousness), so too it depends on *what comes afterwards*. This is because each and every instance of philosophical consciousness (including Hegel’s own) must make its appearance as the determinate expression of a finite, situated human being; philosophical consciousness does not lose its determinacy when it engages in absolute knowing. So even if the philosophical consciousness of the *Phenomenology* successfully comprehends its own object (the ordinary consciousness of the *Phenomenology*), this philosophical consciousness must in turn appear to others (including to us) as an instance of ordinary consciousness – that is, as an object to be better and more fully comprehended by subsequent instances of philosophical consciousness (including our own). Contrary to what Gadamer seems to think, the success of Hegel’s philosophical consciousness in comprehending its own object does not entail that this philosophical consciousness is fully transparent to itself. Indeed, quite the opposite must be the case: if Hegel’s philosophy contained a fully self-transparent and finally determinative articulation of its own meaning, then it would be a dead letter for us, since its meaning would have already been fully exhausted by Hegel’s own self-interpretation. But in that case, Hegel’s philosophy could not make any difference to us, since any making-of-a-difference would be solely our *own* doing (and not at all the doing of the Hegelian inheritance in us). However, if our own (philosophical, observing) consciousness and Hegel’s (ordinary, observed) consciousness were related to each other in this indifferent, external way, then it would be quite literally impossible for us to know what absolute knowing is for Hegel, since for Hegel absolute knowing is the *known* coincidence of philosophical, observing consciousness (in this case, our own consciousness) and ordinary, observed consciousness (in this case, consciousness as expressed by Hegel); but this *known* coincidence is known precisely through the activity of the consciousness that is doing the observing (which in this case would be ourselves as interpreters of Hegel). In other words, our own knowing of what “absolute knowing” is precisely in Hegel’s own sense of the term depends on our subsequent understanding of Hegel better than he understood himself.

Hegel once observed (in his early “Fragments of Historical Studies”) that “no one has totally performed any action”, since an action is truly done only when brought to consciousness as a whole and such consciousness is never present in the individual who acts (Hegel 2002: 102). Hegel would have recognized that this observation applies equally well to his own account of absolute knowing in the *Phenomenology*. Because his own account must appear to others as an expression of what (for these others) is an instance of ordinary consciousness, Hegel realized that he must leave it to others to achieve a better understanding of his own philosophy and to actualize – precisely through this better understanding – what he himself meant by “absolute knowing”. In short, Hegel’s account entails that Hegel himself cannot have the last word regarding what he meant. Notice, finally, that Hegel’s account of absolute knowing entails a kind of circularity: philosophical consciousness finds itself indebted to ordinary consciousness and when philosophical consciousness expresses the truth that it has learned about ordinary consciousness and about itself, it in turn becomes another instance of ordinary consciousness to be interpreted and better understood by subsequent instances of philosophical consciousness. Perhaps in crucial ways Hegel’s thinking anticipates Heidegger’s later, radicalized thinking about the hermeneutical circle.

Notes

- 1 Along these lines, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1992: 198–99) suggests that we ought to understand Dilthey as having transposed the hermeneutical circle by applying it to the “universal context of history”.
- 2 One of Hegel’s early philosophical collaborators, F. W. J. Schelling, made a similar point in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1978: 54) when he observed that the human knower cannot directly intuit an object other than itself and *at the same time* directly intuit itself as intuiting the object.
- 3 And like Heidegger, Hegel (1975c: 91) argued that the human being confronts its own freedom in this radical (existential) sense only when it confronts the possibility of its not-being at all (i.e. its own death).
- 4 As Gadamer helpfully observes, when we know our way around (in German, “knowing one’s way around” is “*Sichverstehen*”) and thus when we understand how to deal with things in our world, we do so because we understand ourselves: “*all such understanding is equally self-understanding*” (Gadamer 1992: 260).
- 5 Once again, this is the point that Schelling (1978: 54) makes when he observes that the human knower cannot directly intuit an object other than itself and *at the same time* directly intuit itself as intuiting the object.

16 Hegel and French post-structuralism

Brent Adkins

Hegel's influence on French post-structuralism can be defined as largely, though not solely, negative. Many French post-structuralist thinkers explicitly characterize their projects as anti-Hegelian. This anti-Hegelianism, however, takes numerous forms ranging from direct engagement to outright refusal. The reason behind this rejection of Hegel lies in the perception that Hegel's philosophy is totalizing. That is, there is no point that lies outside of Hegel's system from which one might criticize it, let alone mount any kind of resistance, political or otherwise. As a result, French post-structuralism coalesced around the notions of "difference" and "alterity" as that which cannot be subsumed into a larger system of thought and thus might form the locus of resistance. This chapter will discuss various ways that French post-structuralism has used the notions of difference and alterity in order to strategically engage with or avoid Hegel's legacy in France following World War II.

Hegel in France

Following World War I, there was little appetite for German philosophy of any kind in France. Hegel was seen as particularly suspect, given his perceived role as an apologist for the Prussian state. The publication in 1929 of Jean Wahl's *Le Malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* marks an isolated but definitive turning point in Hegel's reception in France. The two thinkers, however, that can be credited with making a space for Hegel in the French intellectual landscape are Alexandre Kojève (1902–68) and Jean Hyppolite (1907–68).¹

Kojève, a Russian émigré who studied in Germany with Karl Jaspers before coming to Paris to study in 1927, gave a seminar on Hegel from 1933 to 1939. Participants in his seminar included many who would go on to be leading lights in French intellectual history, such as Raymond

Aron, Georges Bataille, André Breton, Jacques Lacan and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Furthermore, while Jean-Paul Sartre was not a participant in the seminar, he was also highly influenced by Kojève's reading of Hegel (see Schrift 2006: 20–31).

The extent of Kojève's influence stems in part from the fact that there were no competing readings of Hegel to compare it to. Additionally, though, Kojève's reading showed in a compelling way that Hegel's philosophy could be used to account for both the everyday and the political experience of power and domination. Kojève argued (incorrectly) that in Hegel's dialectic of master and slave, the slave emerges triumphant. Kojève takes up the victory of the slave over the master as the lynchpin to both thought and history and sees the most important of Marx's analyses already contained there *in nuce* (see Barnett 1998: 1–37).

Hyppolite's influence on Hegel's reception comes slightly later than Kojève's and for slightly different reasons (see Heckman 1974: xv–xli). While Kojève's seminar filled a vacuum in Hegel studies, Hyppolite's influence arises through his translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (two volumes: 1939–41), his commentary on the *Phenomenology* (*Genèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel*, 1946) and his institutional positions at the Sorbonne and the École Normale Supérieure. In these institutional positions, he taught and supervised the research of nearly all the post-structuralist thinkers we will examine below, including Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou.²

Hyppolite was much less interested than Kojève in the relation between Hegel and Marx. Additionally, Hyppolite did not think that the key to Hegel's work lay in the master–slave dialectic. In his initial commentary on the *Phenomenology*, Hyppolite follows Jean Wahl's lead and focuses on the recurring figure of the Unhappy Consciousness. This focus allowed Hyppolite to take up many of the existential and phenomenological themes that dominated the French intellectual climate immediately following World War II. In 1952, Hyppolite shifted his attention to Hegel's logical works and published *Logique et Existence*. In this book, Hyppolite connects the issues of language and difference that became central in French post-structuralism (see Deleuze 2004: 15–18).

Structuralism in France

The term “structuralism” was coined in 1927 by the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson, who had recently discovered the Swiss linguist

Ferdinand de Saussure. The key insight that Jakobson takes from Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* is that language is a differential system with no positive terms. That is, meaning is produced by the differential relation among terms rather than any positive meaning inhering in the term itself. Thus, "cat" gets its meaning not from the fact that this grouping of letters has any meaning on its own, but from the fact that "cat" differs from "bat", "mat", "fat" or "sat". Meaning arises from the system as a whole, not from individual parts (de Saussure 1959: 120). It was Jakobson who introduced Saussurian linguistics to Claude Lévi-Strauss, who revolutionized anthropology by applying the notion of a differential structure to kinship relations. Jakobson also introduced Saussurian linguistics to Jacques Lacan, who used them to reinterpret Freud's texts and subsequently changed the practice of psychoanalysis. Roland Barthes did the same with literature, while Louis Althusser did the same with Marx. In addition to these leaders in structuralist thought, Maurice Merleau-Ponty was instrumental in introducing the ideas of structuralism into philosophical discourse.

While the rise of structuralism certainly hastens the end of existentialism in France, its relation to the study of Hegel is more ambiguous. Certainly structuralists found much that was fruitful in the work of Nietzsche, Marx and Freud and the rise of these three thinkers in France led (of necessity) to a reduction in status of both phenomenology and Hegel. However, unlike existentialism, there are resources in Hegel that facilitate thinking not only systematically but also differentially. Of all of the post-structuralist thinkers, it is Jacques Derrida who sees this most acutely. Consequently, it is Derrida who spends the most time engaging with Hegel's texts. Furthermore, when Deleuze speaks of a "generalized anti-Hegelianism" in the "Preface" to *Difference and Repetition*, it is not immediately clear which Hegel is being opposed (Deleuze 1994: xix).

As we will see below, each of the thinkers that we take up will be reacting to a different component of Hegel's thought. In most cases the reaction will be negative, although in the case of Derrida the reaction is somewhat tempered, and in the case of Žižek the reaction is mostly positive. Most of the thinkers (again, Žižek is the exception) take Hyppolite's Hegel to be the received Hegel and do little to question the assumptions that Hyppolite brings to the text. At the same time, however, the experience of occupied France, the colonial wars and student protests seem to have inculcated in all of these thinkers a suspicion of totalizing structures, whether these structures are philosophical, political, economic or pedagogic. The difficulty with totalizing thought is that it seems to make resistance and change impossible. Both Hegel

and structuralism fall prey to this suspicion in post-structuralist thought, as thinkers tried to show that such totalization is impossible from within Hegel's texts. This is the move that Derrida and Žižek, and to some extent Irigaray, make. Other thinkers try to work outside Hegel's text in order to produce a theory that in principle resists totalization. Here we find the work of Badiou, Foucault and especially Deleuze.

Post-structuralism

Post-structuralism cannot be considered a movement. It does not group thinkers in the way that "Marxism" does. It does not point to a common methodology in the way that "phenomenology" does. What "post-structuralism" does do, however, is indicate a historical shift. The "post" in "post-structuralism" should be taken in the strict sense of "after". Furthermore, "after" does not indicate that people stopped doing structuralism altogether, but that they began doing theory in a way that wasn't completely determined by structuralist methodology. One of the issues that marks the move away from structuralism in the 1960s is the issue of change. Depending on the thinker, this issue of change can get taken up as difference as such, historical change, or political resistance. The reason that change became an issue for the post-structuralists is that structuralism as a method tends to focus on what does not change (i.e. the structure of what is being analysed). What was lacking for many was an account of how structure arises and develops in the first place. This concern with the origin and development of structure has often been taken up among post-structuralist thinkers as "the event". On the whole, though, thinkers trained in structuralism began to sense a rigidity in structuralism that could not account for all of the rapid change happening around them.

At this point, it is tempting to wonder why Hegel didn't come back into favour. It is quite easy to show that Hegel thought a great deal about the relation between structure and change and he even provides a method that accounts for the origin and development of structures, determinate negation. What worried the post-structuralists about Hegel's method was a concern about the endpoint of Hegel's thought. Most thought that Hegel's method was teleological and that ultimately change was subordinated to structure. Thus, on the post-structuralist assumption, Hegel possessed the same problems as structuralism and it was time to move beyond both Hegel and structuralism.

In what follows, we will look at some of the major post-structuralist thinkers in order to better understand the specific ways in which they

were influenced by Hegel. As we have seen already, the influence is often negative, but not exclusively so. The order of the thinkers below roughly reflects the order in which English-speaking audiences became aware of them. Unfortunately, space limitations preclude looking at some important post-structuralist thinkers, such as Jean-François Lyotard and Judith Butler.³

Michel Foucault (1926–84)

Foucault famously worried in an address in honour of Hyppolite about his own anti-Hegelianism and presumably the “generalized anti-Hegelianism” that Deleuze also speaks about. He worries that “our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us” (Foucault 1972: 235). Foucault’s work takes up Hegel’s challenge in different ways throughout his career.

Foucault’s career is typically divided into three periods: the archaeological, the genealogical and the ethical. While Hegel never becomes a focus of analysis in any of these periods, it is clear that he is most concerned about Hegel in his early, archaeological period. The archaeological period is characterized by an analysis of discursive formations and their development. What interests Foucault in particular is the shift in discursive formations that coincide with the rise of new sciences. Thus, in *The Order of Things* Foucault shows that the rise of modern biology is only possible once the discursive structure that speaks in terms of a homology between macro- and microcosms is abandoned and replaced by an entirely different discursive structure (Foucault 1970: 335–40).

Crucially, though, and this is where Foucault diverges from Hegel, the relation between the two discursive structures is not one of progress, increasing perfection or increasing freedom. For Foucault there is no dialectical link between discursive structures. Furthermore, there is no continuous history that various discursive structures would be species of. Their relation is contingent and discontinuous. He makes this explicit in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* when he writes, “The series described, the limits fixed, the comparisons and correlations made [i.e. Foucault’s aim in this work] are not based on the old philosophies of history, but are intended to question teleologies and totalizations” (Foucault 1972: 15–16). One of the targets here is unquestionably Hegel, although he is not mentioned explicitly.

If the Foucault of the archaeological period takes up the issue of discursive formation directly and is thereby forced to confront both

structuralism and Hegelianism, the Foucault of the genealogical and ethical periods is much more circumspect with regard to these issues. Part of the reason for this is an increased distance from the institutional structuralism in which he was trained. More than that, though, a marked shift in method occurs that makes Nietzsche a much more important interlocutor. Additionally, perhaps because of this methodological shift, the object of Foucault's study shifts away from discursive structures to power relations among bodies in space. It is this move in particular that allows Foucault to avoid confronting Hegel directly and thus to avoid becoming an instance of anti-Hegelianism that is already taken up in the dialectic. Rather, Foucault argues that power is productive and produces both subjects and discursive practices. Neither dialectic nor teleology is required (Foucault 1977: 22–31).

Jacques Derrida (1930–2004)

For Derrida, the only way to avoid Hegel's trap was to engage him directly. This direct engagement is especially pronounced in his early works, such as "The Pit and the Pyramid" and *Glas*. Even beyond works that explicitly engage Hegel's texts, Hegel remains a constant presence. The reason for this from Derrida's perspective is straightforward. Hegel is the thinker of difference, *par excellence*. No other thinker has shown the extent to which thought itself is necessarily the thought of difference. Derrida himself makes this clear when he says that "We will never be finished with the reading and rereading of Hegel and, in a certain way, I do nothing other than attempt to explain myself on this point" (Derrida 1982b: 77).

Of course, Derrida is not strictly Hegelian. There are also strong structuralist, phenomenological and psychoanalytic tendencies in his work. Furthermore, Derrida's project is not to champion Hegel but to read Hegel against Hegel in order to show the limits of Western metaphysics. This is the task of deconstruction. For Derrida, Western metaphysics works by creating a totality. This totality functions on the basis of binary oppositions that make conception-formation possible. Thus, one cannot form a concept of the "good" without at the same time forming a concept of "evil". The task of a philosophical text is to both posit and rigorously maintain this distinction. Deconstruction of a text shows how the rigorous maintenance of this distinction (usually by a privileged metaphor) becomes impossible in the very text trying to maintain it.⁴

So far, there seems to be a great deal in common between Derrida's analysis of texts and Hegel's account of the way thought works. It is

precisely for this reason that Derrida thinks that we will never be done reading Hegel. There is too much that is fruitful in Hegel's work to be ignored. At the same time, however, the work of deconstruction is not done when it shows that a crucial distinction cannot be maintained. For Derrida the next step is to show the conditions for the possibility of the binary opposition in the first place. It is precisely here that Derrida and Hegel part ways. On Derrida's reading of Hegel, these binary oppositions are part of a totality known as "spirit" or the "idea" and the progress of thought and history is the sublation of all these oppositions into an inescapable whole with no outside. In contrast to this, Derrida is proposing that these binary oppositions are made both possible and impossible by a differential structure with no positive terms (à la Saussure). The result is that difference is continually reintroduced and finally cannot be sublated into a totality.

Luce Irigaray (1930–)

Irigaray was born in Belgium and much of her early training focused on literature, linguistics and psychoanalysis. She attended Lacan's seminar, but her 1974 work *Speculum of the Other Woman* was seen as so inimical to psychoanalysis that she was ejected from Lacan's École Freudienne de Paris and dismissed from her position in the Department of Psychoanalysis at the University of Paris VIII-Vincennes (Schrift 2006: 139–40).

Methodologically, the early Irigaray is closest to Derrida. Like Derrida, she is focused on the way in which concept-formation is dependent on binary oppositions and, at the same time, excludes one term of the binary. In Irigaray's case, she is focused on the man/woman opposition, particularly as it functions in psychoanalysis. However, she traces this opposition throughout Western thought and argues that the figure of woman is always the displaced and specular double of man. It is in this context that Irigaray first engages with Hegel. In *Speculum*, Irigaray juxtaposes Hegel's discussion of sexual difference in the *Philosophy of Nature* with his appropriation of Sophocles' *Antigone*. On this reading, Hegel is still seen as a totalizing thinker that swallows up difference. In this particular case the difference that is swallowed up is woman (Irigaray 1985: 214–26).

In her more recent work on politics, Irigaray can be seen as returning to Hegel's notion of civil society as a way of mediating the concerns of individuals within the state. For Irigaray, sexual difference is natural and this naturalness should be reflected in the laws of society. Irigaray's

hope in this restructuring of both family and society is that both might become more just (Stone 2002: 24–36).

What Irigaray still rejects in Hegel, though, is a politics of recognition that would arise out of the unequal recognition of the master–slave dialectic. The primary difficulty with a politics of recognition that arises out of the master–slave dialectic is that it does not allow for a sufficiently differentiated feminine subjectivity to arise. Hegel's reading of the *Antigone* already suggests this need, but Hegel fails to capitalize on what his own text suggests. Irigaray's later work is aimed precisely at supporting this feminine subjectivity through concrete policy proposals.

As Irigaray's thought has developed over the years, she seems to have moved away from her critical analysis of Hegel as a totalizing thinker, especially with regard to gender. She is now pursuing what she takes to be useful in Hegel for thinking through the feminine. Thus, Irigaray begins in the same place as most of the other French post-structuralists, but has become more conciliatory towards some aspects of Hegel in her later thought.

Gilles Deleuze (1925–95)

Deleuze's early works are primarily monographs on single thinkers. While there are many philosophers among these monographs such as Hume, Nietzsche and Kant, there are also literary figures such as Proust and Sacher-Masoch. Conspicuously absent from his early monographs, though, is Hegel, especially given Deleuze's close work with Hyppolite. Hegel does arise for some extended analysis in *Difference and Repetition*, but for the most part Hegel is absent from Deleuze's work.

In this respect Deleuze differs from both Foucault and Derrida. Deleuze was not concerned that his anti-Hegelianism was a trick that made him more Hegelian. Deleuze simply refused to take up the dialectic at all. By the same token, Deleuze did not think, as Derrida did, that Hegel must be delimited internally. Again, this would grant too much to Hegel from the outset. Given these stipulations, it might be better to say that Deleuze was a non-Hegelian, rather than an anti-Hegelian.

However, a few general points can be made with regard to how Deleuze might respond to Hegel. As Deleuze notes in both *Difference and Repetition* and *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, the problem with Hegel is that he tries to think difference through the dialectic. What this means for Deleuze is that difference only becomes conceivable when it is raised to the level of contradiction. For Deleuze this fails on at least

three levels. First, contradiction is a very specific kind of difference and not indicative of difference in general. Second, the difference of contradiction can only be a difference of two, not of a multiple.⁵ Deleuze is trying to think the difference of the multiple and not the difference of two opposed terms. Third, by Deleuze's lights, philosophy in general (Hegel included) has tended to abandon the difficult work of thinking in terms of the pre-personal forces that (temporarily) constitute forms and subjects for thinking in terms of forms and subjects themselves. In these terms, the problem with Hegel lies in the fact that he is concerned about the dialectical relation of these forms and subjects. In contrast to this, Deleuze proposes that thinking be done in terms of assemblages that are themselves temporarily constituted by an intersection of pre-personal forces. Furthermore, these assemblages are contingently connected with one another, not necessarily connected by way of contradiction.⁶

Also, notice that unlike Foucault and Derrida, Deleuze does not seem to be as concerned about the putatively totalizing nature of Hegel's thought. He is concerned about difference, but argues that insofar as difference is primary, the real wonder is that totalities form at all. In contrast to this, Foucault and Derrida seem to begin from the premise of totalities and then move to delimit them (Deleuze 2006: 280).

Slavoj Žižek (1949–)

Žižek is a Slovenian political philosopher, part of a group of Slovenian political philosophers (including Renata Salecl and Joan Copjec) that arose in the wake of the breakup of the Soviet Union and applied Lacanian psychoanalysis to political events. Unlike most of the other thinkers here, Žižek was not trained by Hyppolite or even Lacan. He was trained in France by Lacan's protégé (and son-in-law) Jacques-Alain Miller.

Because of his different training, background and age, Žižek has a markedly different outlook on Hegel than the other thinkers we have examined here. While he agrees with Derrida that we will never be finished reading and re-reading Hegel, Žižek's appropriation is much more positive. Furthermore and taking his cue from Lacan, Žižek argues that far from leaving us with a totality from which nothing escapes, Hegel, in fact, continually shows that the result of the dialectic is the impossibility of any totality. The reason for this impossibility lies in Žižek's focus on the work of the negative in Hegel. The negative, according to Žižek, is the engine of the dialectic. It is internal to the dialectic and, in principle, not sublatale.

With regard to the negative in Hegel, Žižek's position has been slowly evolving. In his earlier works, such as *Tarrying with the Negative*, Kant provides the theoretical framework that introduces the negative into subjectivity (Žižek 1993: 21). Hegel and Marx remain important interlocutors, but ultimately Kant provides the crucial insight that allows Žižek to make his point. As Žižek's thought evolves, though, he begins to rely increasingly on Lacan and Hegel. In *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*, for example, he repeatedly chides Marx for not being Hegelian enough (Žižek 2001: 239–56). By the time of *The Monstrosity of Christ*, Žižek is adamant that at crucial points even Lacan fails to be Hegelian enough (Žižek & Milbank 2009: 82–101).

Thus, even though Žižek is undeniably a French post-structuralist, Hegel's influence on him is very different. He is not suspicious of Hegel. He revels in the way that everything is already explained by Hegel. In this sense, Žižek thinks that Foucault is right. Hegel is waiting at the end of every path. However, Žižek disagrees with the received reading of Hegel as absorbing every possible difference into the same. On Žižek's reading, Hegel does not destroy alterity; rather, Hegel shows precisely the degree to which our experience is predicated on the relation to this alterity. This alterity, however, is the negative itself. Thus, on Žižek's reading, this ineluctable alterity is nothing, the empty space that Lacan would call the big Other.

Alain Badiou (1937–)

While Badiou is younger than Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze, he did go through a very similar training process. Badiou also studied under Hyppolite, but it is clear that Louis Althusser had a much greater impact on his development. Furthermore, Badiou is much more militant in his political engagements and continually pursues the concrete political implications of his theoretical work. This is not to say that the other French post-structuralists were not politically involved. However, Badiou's Maoism led him to interrupt the classes of other professors at the University of Paris VIII-Vincennes (including Deleuze's) in order to check for political purity.

Badiou's relation to Hegel is much less engaged than Foucault's and Derrida's and certainly less engaged than Žižek's. At the same time, however, Badiou is more engaged than Deleuze. Badiou does not avoid Hegel, but Hegel is not given a special place in his philosophy either. For Badiou, Hegel's philosophy is simply another opportunity to show how his own philosophy differs.

In the case of his two major works, *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou's position on Hegel remains unchanged, although he formulates it differently in each book. On Badiou's reading of Hegel, Hegel posits the existence of the one or the whole and at the same time argues that nothing but the whole exists. The reason that Hegel argues this way is that, at a crucial moment, he excludes mathematical infinity from philosophical consideration. Badiou's counterclaim, made precisely on the basis of a version of mathematical infinity, is that the one or the whole does not exist (see Badiou 2005: 161–70; 2009: 141–52).

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore the subtleties of Badiou's reading of Hegel, it is worth noting that Badiou reads Hegel as the totalizing thinker of the whole, just as Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze do. However, much more like Deleuze than either Foucault or Derrida, Badiou is less concerned with totality than difference. Like Deleuze, Badiou's fundamental starting point is the multiple that precedes both the one and the many. However, since Deleuze and Badiou conceive of the multiple differently, they have different accounts of how totalities form and are exceeded (see Badiou 2000; J. Williams 2009).

Conclusion

As we have seen, Hegel's influence on French post-structuralism presupposes in each case a very specific kind of Hegel. In most cases, this Hegel is the Hegel received from Hyppolite that so worried Foucault. This received Hegel was seen as the destroyer of difference and alterity, a Hegel made all the more insidious by the fact that he destroyed difference precisely by making a place for it. The problem, as far as French post-structuralism was concerned, is that a place was made for difference only by drawing it into the dialectic and making it part of the totality. From this perspective it is easy to see why resistance was the primary reaction to Hegel, not only resistance to Hegel's philosophy, but resistance to Hegel as a symbol of what is dangerous about philosophy. The important exception here is Žižek. As we saw above, Žižek does not read Hegel as a totalizing thinker. For the most part he reads him as a Lacanian *avant la lettre* and often reads Hegel as a more consistent Lacanian than Lacan himself.

Furthermore, the French post-structuralist reading of Hegel has forced Hegel scholars to reassess their readings of Hegel. The trend in the last twenty years has been to read Hegel as an open-ended, non-totalizing thinker. Of course, reading Hegel as a totalizing or non-totalizing thinker goes all the way back to the initial reception of Hegel during his lifetime and immediately following his death. The young (or left)

Hegelians read Hegel's work as culminating in an open-ended anthropology. At the same time, the old (or right) Hegelians read Hegel's work as culminating in a theology. The frustrating thing about Hegel is that there are texts that support both of these readings. The ironic thing about French post-structuralism is that for the most part they read Hegel according to the old Hegelian interpretation and then spend much of their efforts trying to produce a young Hegelianism without Hegel. Perhaps Foucault's worries about Hegel were not unfounded.

Notes

- 1 Alexandre Koyré might be mentioned here, as well, but Kojève and Hyppolite remain the most important sources for introducing Hegel to France.
- 2 For the role played by institutions in French education, particularly the École Normale Supérieure, see Schrift (2006: 188–208).
- 3 But see, for example, Lyotard (1984, 1992) and Butler (1987, 2000).
- 4 See Derrida (1982c), for example, where he lays bare his methodology.
- 5 On these two points see Deleuze (1994: 262–304; 1983: 147–94).
- 6 On this final point see Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 3–25).

Chronology of Hegel's life

- 1770 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is born in Stuttgart (27 August).
- 1777 Hegel begins to attend the Stuttgart *Gymnasium*.
- 1781 Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (first edition) is published.
- 1783 Hegel's mother dies (20 September).
- 1785 Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* is published.
- 1788 Hegel leaves the Stuttgart *Gymnasium* and enters the Tübinger Stift, where he will study theology and philosophy along with Schelling and Hölderlin. Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* is published.
- 1789 With the storming of the Bastille in Paris (14 July), the French Revolution begins.
- 1790 Hegel receives his *Magister* (master's) degree. Kant's *Critique of Judgment* is published.
- 1792 Fichte's *Critique of all Revelation* is published.
- 1793 Hegel completes his studies at the Tübinger Stift and takes up a position as private tutor with the family of Captain Karl Friedrich von Steiger in Berne (Switzerland). Kant's *Religion within the Bounds of Reason alone* is published.
- 1794 Fichte begins to publish his *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*.
- 1795 Hegel works on writing "The Life of Jesus" and on "The Positivity of the Christian Religion". Kant's *Towards Perpetual Peace* is published.
- 1797 Hegel moves to Frankfurt am Main in order to take up a tutoring position which his friend Hölderlin had helped to arrange for him with the family of Johann Noë Gogel, a wine merchant.

- 1799 Hegel's father dies (14 January). Hegel writes "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate".
- 1800 Schelling publishes his *System of Transcendental Idealism*.
- 1801 Hegel goes to the University of Jena (where Schelling is already a professor of philosophy) in order to take a position as an unsalaried lecturer (*Privatdozent*). Hegel also defends his *Habilitationsschrift* (dissertation), *On the Orbits of the Planets*. Hegel's first philosophical publication, an essay entitled "The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy", appears in print.
- 1802 Hegel and Schelling together begin editing and publishing the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*. Publication of this journal will continue until the summer of 1803, when Schelling leaves Jena. The essays that Hegel will publish in this journal include: "Faith and Knowledge", "The Relation of Scepticism to Philosophy" and "On the Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law".
- 1804 Kant dies (12 February). Napoleon becomes Emperor (2 December), placing the Emperor's crown on his own head during a ceremony held in the presence of Pope Pius VII.
- 1805 Hegel is appointed Extraordinary (unsalaried) Professor at the University of Jena.
- 1806 Hegel completes his manuscript of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as Napoleon's armies defeat Prussian troops at the Battle of Jena.
- 1807 Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is published. Christiana Burkhardt (née Fischer), Hegel's landlady and housekeeper in Jena, gives birth (5 February) to his illegitimate son, Ludwig Fischer. In March, Hegel moves to Bamberg to become editor of a local newspaper, the *Bamberger Zeitung*.
- 1808 Hegel moves to Nuremberg in November to become rector of a *Gymnasium*.
- 1811 Hegel marries Marie von Tucher (born 1791) on September 15.
- 1812 Volume 1 of Hegel's *Science of Logic* (the Logic of Being) is published. Hegel's daughter, Susanna, is born on 27 June, but dies less than two months later, on 8 August.

- 1813 Volume 2 of the *Science of Logic* (the Logic of Essence) is published. Hegel's son, Karl, is born on 7 June.
- 1814 Fichte dies (29 January). Hegel's son, Immanuel, is born (24 September).
- 1816 Volume 3 of Hegel's *Science of Logic* (the Logic of the Concept) is published. Hegel becomes Professor of Philosophy at the University of Heidelberg.
- 1817 The first edition of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* is published.
- 1818 Hegel becomes Professor of Philosophy at the University of Berlin, where he will remain until his death.
- 1820/21 Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is published. (The book was published in October of 1820, but its original title page included the publication date of 1821.)
- 1821 Hegel lectures for the first time on the philosophy of religion. Napoleon dies (5 May).
- 1826 Hegel founds the *Yearbooks for Scientific Critique*.
- 1827 The second edition of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* is published.
- 1830 Hegel becomes Rector of the University of Berlin. The third edition of his *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* is published.
- 1831 In the midst of a cholera outbreak, Hegel suddenly and unexpectedly dies in Berlin (14 November). Even though doctors first determined that Hegel had died of cholera, the true cause of death was probably not cholera (Hegel lacked the usual cholera-related symptoms), but rather a severe gastrointestinal ailment.

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